

A public letter to those interested in the current debate on the Assisted Dying bill

The Assisted Dying bill before Victorian Parliament deeply saddens me, for what it says, and where it will lead. For the sake of an apparently anticipated 160 people or so a year, who are able to argue rationally for their own euthanasia under this bill, we imperil many.

I cannot support a bill which allows for assisted suicide, and for some people to administer death to others. It would change society to its core if these ideas become normalised.

Once we cross the Rubicon, the terrible consequence will be that it becomes absurd to support euthanasia for some but not others. The argument would be – ‘why should the articulate have more rights than the suffering voiceless?’

If the rational patient with 12 months to live can choose death, and others can be allowed to administer it, some will soon ask: ‘how can we be so cruel as to let the mentally tormented suffer endlessly? Or the demented? Or the abandoned severely disabled who seem to have no quality of life? Surely if they could speak, they would choose a gentle death now, rather than all this suffering?’ After all, equality of rights and options is what the human rights debates are all about. I dread a society which is heading to such discussions, imperilling the most vulnerable.

As for talk of safeguards, and as a lawyer working in crime, I am shocked at the debate’s naiveté. Imagine an elderly sick woman, who is pressured by uncaring relatives and eventually goes to the doctors pleading for pills so she can kill herself, in truth to cease to be a burden to her heirs. She is then at home with the pills. There is no further supervision. From then on, she is too vulnerable. Who will know what pressures she is placed under to end it all? Who will care? Who will know who administers, in what circumstances, and who will care?

This bill immediately places the elderly sick, and the most vulnerable, under intolerable pressures. Over time, despite its current intent to assist a few rational people to die, the changes in attitude it signals will undermine society’s support for the lives of the voiceless and those most in need. It should be rejected.

Julian McMahon AC

Barrister

Melbourne



17. 10. 17