

Update on End Of Life Choice Bill

The End of Life Choice Bill, is currently before parliament. On April 9th the select committee presented their report of and on a member's day in May, there will be a 2nd reading, followed by Members of Parliament having a conscious vote (not along party lines). This bill sets out the conditions by which a New Zealander can request that a doctor help end their life (18 year old, suffering from either a terminal illness or a "grievous and irremediable medical condition" and understand what assisted dying is). This bill is not about refusing treatment or receiving pain relief or other symptom management at the end of life (that is already legal) but about either receiving a lethal injection from a doctor (euthanasia) or being given a prescription for medication you take yourself (assisted suicide).

As Christians we should be moved to stand up for those who are vulnerable and could be harmed by this. My belief is that all people are made in the image of God and have innate value adds to this. I stand with people of other faiths or no faith who oppose this bill based on ethical arguments that can be understood from a secular human perspective. I acknowledge that there are Christian (and others) motivated by compassion who support this bill as they see it as a response to suffering. I to want to end suffering but do not agree that intentionally killing people is the way to do it as it is unsafe and unnecessary.

I am one of over 1000 kiwi doctors that signed an open letter saying they want no part of assisted suicide. I am really concerned about that this will mean for vulnerable people.

- Elderly and disabled people may be overtly coerced or feel that they are a burden to others – the "safe guards" in the bill do no address this
- It sends mixed messages to youth and others contemplating suicide
- It will irrevocably change the doctor-patient relationship as well as medicine as a profession
- Palliative care is poorly funded and not adequately accessible in all parts of New Zealand
- It is very uncommon (I've never seen it in my career) for people to die with pain or other unpleasant symptoms not addressed by a palliative care approach
- Where euthanasia or assisted suicide is requested where legal it is usually for existential suffering not pain
- As it stands the bill's criteria of "grievous and irremediable medical condition" could have very loose interpretation
- Doctors are poor at predicting prognosis and sometimes get the diagnosis wrong
- Only a few years after similar legislation has been introduced in Canada it is being applied to those without a terminal condition (i.e. a woman with osteoarthritis) and government is exploring expanding to include people under 18 and those who primary condition is a mental health illness

If you share my concerns please write to our local MP ***** either by email so they get it before May 1st or by post – which they are more likely to read but if the 2nd reading is early in May the may not receive it prior. You can also sign a petition organised by the Care Alliance. This is a serious and complex topic and I encourage everyone to read widely and think deeply about this. I'm happy to answer questions / point more to more information if they wish. -Kind Regards, Dr *****