

VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA BILL

Adjourned debate on second reading.

(Continued from 1 March 2012.)

The Hon. R.B. SUCH (Fisher) (11:09): In summarising this, I believe this is a very reasonable proposition. It is a very restricted option, and it will probably only apply to fewer than a dozen people in South Australia. To qualify you have to be in the terminal phase of a terminal illness and unable to get adequate pain relief. My belief is that if you can get adequate pain relief it takes away much of the argument for someone ending their life.

If palliative care is working, then I do not believe you need prematurely to end a life. You have to be in the final phase of a terminal illness. The doctors participating have to be doctors who know the patient, so you cannot go around doctor shopping. It will not allow advance requests: you cannot put in writing, 'If I become a vegetable, I want my life ended.' My bill does not allow that. My bill does not allow people who are depressed to avail themselves of this.

I have been criticised by some people in the voluntary euthanasia movement because my bill is so restrictive and tight, but I think this is a fair and reasonable approach. We had the sad case of Gordon Bruce, the former president of the upper house, a lovely man, who died in absolute agony begging people to end his life. I do not believe we should have that situation. There are some illnesses where you cannot prevent or stop the pain completely; in most cases you can, but in some you cannot. Motor neurone and some bone cancers are awful diseases, where people are crying out in agony for people to kill them, yet we cannot allow that person to exercise that right of autonomy over their life.

This bill is not, in my view, about death but about life, about the quality of life, people having the right to choose when they cannot get adequate pain relief. I was on the Social Development Committee that inquired into voluntary euthanasia, and I remember one senior cleric who spoke to the committee said 'pain is good for people' and that 'pain refines the person' and all this sort of thing. Afterwards, two of the lovely nuns from Mary Potter Hospice came up to me, put their arm on me, and said, 'He's not in the real world; we're dealing with death every day and it's a grey area, it's not black and white.' There was such a contrast between the senior cleric saying that pain was good for people and the nuns saying that it was not black and white.

We know from the surveys that most people support voluntary euthanasia—it is about 80 per cent—but it has to have proper safeguards. This bill of mine will not allow people to get rid of people. You are not allowed to benefit. If you are

involved in the process, you are not allowed to benefit financially from the death of a person—that is prohibited under this bill. So, the argument that people will want to get rid of their grandparents to obtain their assets is not allowed under my bill; there are a lot of safeguards in it.

I have said to people opposed to voluntary euthanasia (and I respect their views) that, if you can tell me how this bill can be made tighter with greater safeguards, let me know. I have not had one proposition put to me. We need to make a decision. This bill comes after a lot of effort, a lot of consideration. I go back to the time when John Quirke introduced a bill in here. That bill was not even allowed to be discussed, so we have come a long way. The time has come now when we should allow people—

The Hon. M.J. Atkinson: It got a full second reading.

The Hon. R.B. SUCH: No, it was not allowed to go through the full process of committee. I think the time has come when we need to take a stand on this issue and, if people want to move amendments in committee, they can if they can think of ways to improve it. Now is the time when we should vote for people to end their life with dignity if they are suffering unbearable, enduring pain. I commend the bill to the house.

The house divided on the second reading:

AYES (20)

Bedford, F.E. Close,
S.E. Gardner, J.A.W.
Key, S.W. Pisoni,
D.G. Sibbons, A.J.
Weatherill, J.W.

Bignell, L.W. Conlon,
P.F. Geraghty, R.K.
Marshall, S.S.
Portolesi, G. Such,
R.B. (teller) Wright,
M.J.

Caica, P. Fox,
C.C. Hill, J.D.
McFetridge, D.
Sanderson, R.
Thompson, M.G.

NOES (22)

Atkinson, M.J.
Chapman, V.A.
Griffiths, S.P.
Pederick, A.S.
Piccolo, T. Snelling,
J.J. Venning, I.H.
Williams, M.R.

Bettison. Z.L. Evans,
I.F. Koutsantonis, A.
(teller) Pegler,
D.W. Rankine,
J.M. Treloar,
P.A. Vlahos, L.A.

Brock, G.G.
Goldsworthy, M.R.
Odenwalder, L.K.
Pengilly, M. Rau,
J.R. van Holst
Pellekaan, D.C.
Whetstone, T.J.

Majority of 2 for the noes.

Second reading thus negatived.