

VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA BILL

The Hon. R.B. SUCH (Fisher) (11:03): Obtained leave and introduced a bill for an act to provide for the administration of medical procedures to assist the death of a limited number of patients who are in the terminal phase of a terminal illness, who are suffering unbearable pain and who have expressed a desire for the procedures subject to appropriate safeguards; and for other purposes. Read a first time.

The Hon. R.B. SUCH (Fisher) (11:04): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

This is a reintroduction, in a slightly modified form, of a bill that has been previously introduced but in which debate was never completed. Following some suggestions from at least one member in this place, changes have been made and this bill would apply to a limited number of patients who are in the terminal phase of a terminal illness and who are suffering unbearable pain and are not able to get that pain treated. In South Australia, in one year, you are talking about maybe a dozen people, but they are still important—I do not care whether it is one person.

So, this bill is not a blanket. A lot of people have been critical and said, 'Look, you don't allow for advance requests, you don't allow for people who are despondent.' No; I am not advocating or putting in any proposal relating to that. My bill is specifically for people who have terrible illnesses, such as motor neurone disease, who are screaming out in agony, like the former President of the Legislative Council was, because the pain relief is not helping those people. Pain relief helps most people with pain, and that is why palliative care is fantastic, but there are some people suffering from things like motor neurone disease and some bone cancers who cannot adequately suppress the pain.

This bill is for the benefit of those people to have a choice to end their life. The person has to be compos, they cannot make an advance request and say, 'Look, if I'm in a vegetative state I want to have my life ended.' That is not possible under this bill. This bill does not allow for that. It does not allow for people who are depressed, or who do not want to live life. It only applies to that very small number who cannot get adequate palliative care, because my argument is that if you can get adequate palliative care and you are not suffering then I think it takes away a lot of the justification for ending the life.

I think people know the general issue, they either support voluntary euthanasia or they do not. I thank the member for Adelaide who relayed some changes in after meeting with other people. She asked if the bill could be

changed so that the treating practitioners referred to were currently treating the person who seeks voluntary euthanasia. I think that is a reasonable proposition and I have put that in the bill. You do not want people, in effect, doctor shopping on a matter like this. It was a good suggestion which came from the member for Adelaide, I think after she met with people who are interested in this subject.

The member also asked if on the death certificate it could indicate that voluntary euthanasia was administered. I have put that in. I think that is also a useful provision. I do not see how it will alter the reality all that much, but some people thought it should go in. The bill has the usual, and continuing, elements from the previous bill: there will be a monitoring committee; the request cannot be made by someone who is suffering from depression; the medical practitioners have to be currently treating the person, so that avoids people shopping around; and adult witnesses must not be persons who are related to the person making the request. So, you cannot have someone making a request on behalf of someone else who is connected to them or who are in any way beneficiaries, financial or otherwise, of that person.

People suggest that sometimes people will want lives to end because they will benefit. Under this bill that cannot happen, you are prohibited if you are a beneficiary and you are prohibited if you are related to the person who has made the request.

Just to quickly summarise, some people talk about voluntary euthanasia bills as 'death bills'. I turn that around and say that this about the quality of life. I am not pro-death, I am in favour of quality of life, and I feel very passionately that people should have a quality of life. I have met with people from various churches—I have met with the local Catholic priest, I have met with and heard the opinions of people from the Lutheran church and some of the other churches, such as the Baptist church and so on. If you look at public opinion, you will find that about 80 per cent of the adult population supports voluntary euthanasia with appropriate safeguards.

I understand that some of the churches take the view that it is okay to withdraw life support, but I guess to them it comes down to the intent. In this bill, the intention is that it apply only to someone who is dying and in the final stage with significant pain that cannot be relieved. The reality is that we have we have euthanasia at the moment because doctors end lives through the increase of pain relief, or sometimes through treatments, and they know full well that by doing that they increase the risk of death.

The argument put forward by some would be that they are not seeking to end that life but that it is a consequence of their treatment. The reality is that euthanasia exists in our community, and I think that if medical practitioners were

able to speak openly and freely without the threat of legal action they would tell you that that is the case.

I believe it is time that we did provide for those poor souls who are suffering, if they so choose: it is voluntary euthanasia. I think some people tend to get confused with voluntary and involuntary, but this is voluntary euthanasia. It is time that we gave those people a choice about their life and the quality of their life. If they wish to end it because of unbearable pain and suffering, then I believe they should have that legal right. I commend this bill to the house.

Debate adjourned on motion of Mrs Geraghty.