

New head of inquiry is 'sympathetic' to assisted suicide law

BY SIMON CALDWELL

THE PEER appointed by the Government to head the inquiry into the Liverpool Care Pathway has said she is "sympathetic" to changing the law to allow assisted suicide.

The revelations emerged after Julia Neuberger, a crossbench peer and a rabbi, was unveiled

by Care Services Minister Norman Lamb as the "independent" chairwoman of an inquiry to examine the workings of the controversial end-of-life process amid hundreds of complaints by doctors and families that it is operating as a "euthanasia pathway".

The terms of reference of the inquiry state that a major objec-

tive is to "restore public confidence" in the wake of the scandal and Baroness Neuberger has been given until the summer to report to ministers.

But her appointment to lead such a sensitive inquiry was met with dismay by some anti-euthanasia campaigners because of the opinions she has openly expressed about patients being

allowed to kill themselves. Most notable of these came during a lecture to a largely Catholic audience at Tyburn Convent in London in June 2011.

Baroness Neuberger said that although she thought it was not "a good idea for our health professionals to kill their patients any more than they do accidentally" she believed there was a

case for allowing terminally ill patients to take their own lives.

"I do have some sympathy and many people I think will disagree with me with the idea that people who are already terminally ill and finding their situation unbearable, that they should be given the wherewithal to take their own lives," she said.

In her lecture, Baroness

Neuberger also predicted that "at some point there is going to be a change in public policy because ... young people are more in favour" of assisted suicide.

Elsbeth Chowdharay-Best, the honorary secretary of Alert, the anti-euthanasia pressure group, said it was unwise for the Government to appoint a person apparently in favour of assisted

suicide to remedy the LCP scandal. She said: "Now that a large number of families are complaining about the premature deaths of their relatives in hospital while on the Liverpool Care Pathway it is extraordinary that somebody who supports assisted suicide should have been chosen to lead an 'independent' inquiry into it."

Culture Herald 25.1.13