

# Doctors cannot be trusted to play God, says actress

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Britain's best-known disabled actress has urged parliament to throw out moves to legalise assisted dying, saying she does not trust doctors with extra power to prescribe lethal drugs.

Liz Carr, who plays the forensic scientist Clarissa Mullery in the BBC drama *Silent Witness*, said physicians already had enough power over life and death without giving them more. She said it was safer to leave it to the courts.

Ms Carr, in her 40s, has been in a wheelchair since childhood and admits that she would not be alive today if it were not for the talent and dedication of doctors who treat her. "But I know they are fallible. Some on my own medical team have underestimated my life expectancy. It is very common for someone with a disability to be told they are not likely to live until a certain age — and for them to carry on living," she told *The Times* on the eve of a Lords debate on the issue.

She has also seen disbelief among doctors that severely disabled people can have any quality of life and believes that this affects their judg-

**Liz Carr says some doctors are biased over disability**



ment. "I don't think doctors are malicious, but there is a prejudice. They wonder how someone they are treating can have any quality of life because they are so dependent on carers or seem to have lost their dignity. They do not think they could cope if it was them. But that person may have adapted very well to their condition to the point of living a good life."

Peers will debate a bill legalising assisted dying on Friday. It would allow doctors to administer lethal doses of medication to those with a terminal illness and only six months to live.

Although a strong majority of the public favours a legal change, religious leaders, the main disability campaign groups and doctors' professional bodies are all opposed.

The prime minister said yesterday that he was not convinced about a new law. "I worry about legalising euthanasia. People might be being pushed into things that they don't actually want for themselves, but by all means let's have the debate," David Cameron said.

In her interview, Ms Carr was also anxious that there was a blurring of boundaries in the public mind about the difference between terminal illness and disability. The champions of assisted dying, including the late Tony Nicklinson, who had locked-in syndrome, and Paul Lamb, who has no movement in any of his limbs, would not be covered by the remit of this bill.

Other high-profile disabled people who are in favour of assisted dying include Stephen Hawking, the physicist, and Sir Chris Woodhead, the former chief inspector of schools.

Richard Hawkes, the chief executive of the disability charity Scope, said that by and large disabled people were worried about a change in the law. "They are concerned that it will lead to disabled people, and other vulnerable people, feeling under pressure to end their lives. The campaign reinforces deep-seated beliefs that the lives of disabled people are not worth as much as other people's," he said.