

'Assisted dying would

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lure me to the grave'

On a day of impassioned debate in the Lords, disabled peer tells how changing the law would make it too easy for doctors to give her a way out

By John Bingham
and Matthew Holehouse

A SEVERELY disabled peer issued an impassioned plea to the House of Lords on the assisted dying Bill yesterday, saying: "This offers no comfort to me - it frightens me."

Baroness Campbell of Surbiton, who suffers from severe spinal muscular atrophy, said that in moments of despair she might be tempted to ask for assisted dying and, if the law changed, doctors would not try to stop her.

She was speaking during a marathon

debate, in which Lord Falconer's Bill was given its first parliamentary airing.

The legislation would allow doctors to give terminally ill patients a lethal dose of drugs. It specifically excludes those like Baroness Campbell who are not considered terminally ill.

But, breathing through a ventilator, she told fellow peers: "Imagine that [the Bill] is already law and that I ask for assistance to die. Do your Lordships think that I would be refused?"

"You can be sure that there would be doctors and lawyers willing to support my right to die. Sadly, many would put



Baroness Campbell of Surbiton claimed doctors would put effort into ending her life instead of changing her mind

their energies into that rather than improving my situation or helping me to change my mind."

In one of the most impassioned parliamentary debates of recent times, peers spoke about the darkest moments in their

lives and recounted in vivid detail the deaths - some peaceful, some in agony - of husbands, wives, fathers and mothers.

During the debate, in which almost 130 peers lined up to speak, supporters of the Bill received the backing of a former archbishop of Canterbury, a former Metropolitan Police commissioner, a former lord chancellor and a rabbi - but so did the opponents.

Lord Tebbit, whose wife was left disabled by the IRA's Brighton bomb, said a change in the law would inevitably put the vulnerable under pressure to end their lives. "Those who care for such peo-

ple are all too familiar with the moment of black despair which prompts those words: 'I would be better dead so you can get on with your life'," he told them.

Baroness Symons recounted how both her father and her husband were diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia. Her father died shortly afterwards and her husband, in agony, begged to be allowed to slip away, but later recovered.

"I do not know what the outcome would have been if my friend's Bill had been on the statute book," she said. "However, I am grateful that it was not."

Lord Mitchell told the house that he

suspects his mother-in-law killed herself because she feared being charged as an accomplice in her husband's suicide.

Jack Lowy, his father-in-law, was a Holocaust survivor and highly regarded biophysicist who stockpiled barbiturates after being diagnosed with acute myeloid leukaemia which he knew would kill him.

Lord Mitchell said he could not be certain why Ruth Lowy decided to join her husband in committing suicide in 2000, but "had this Bill been law she might have chosen to live".

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