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Assisted dying

Sir, We are all doctors who work with people approaching the end of their lives. We note that Lord Falconer of Thoroton's private member's bill to legalise physician-assisted suicide for terminally ill patients has entered its committee stage in the Lords.

We believe that such a law exposes the most vulnerable in society to harm. We come across patients regularly who feel a burden to their relatives and a burden to society due to their particular health needs.

Proponents of such a bill point to the "straightforward" cases — where there is a highly intelligent, empowered individual who is able to articulate their wishes. We point to those with dementia, learning disabilities, mental health needs, emotional insecurity or any other vulnerability which may make assessing their true wishes difficult and subjective. What safeguards Lord Falconer's bill contains will not prevent vulnerable patients from feeling pressurised by society, the media, relatives or even healthcare professionals to curtail their life prematurely.

We understand and have witnessed cases where dignity was lacking in the last days of life. We think this is appalling and will continue to work on an individual and organisational basis to improve the quality of end of life care in the UK. However, we do not believe that legalising assisted suicide for terminally ill people is the answer.

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Plus a further 19 signatories whose names can be found at times.co.uk/letters