

# 'Our laws forced me to use Dignitas too soon'

Father with tumour said he would have tried surgery if family could have assisted his death

By Patrick Sawyer

A FATHER of three who killed himself at Dignitas did not seek further treatment for his cancer because he feared that if he ended up paralysed his family would be left facing prosecution for helping him end his life.

In an interview given shortly before his death last Friday, Jeffrey Spector suggested that he would have undergone surgery for the tumour on his spine had his family been allowed to assist his death at the point when his condition began to deteriorate.

But he said the fact that assisted suicide is illegal in Britain meant he needed to take his own life at the Swiss clinic before his condition became more severe, and left him unable to do so without the help of loved ones.

In an interview with his local newspaper published yesterday, Mr Spector, who

*'If the UK law was changed, I would go down the surgery route... I would not have gone when I did'*

died at Dignitas after taking a fatal dose of barbiturates, said: "If the UK law was changed, I would go down the surgery route to take the tumour out; get rid of it. Conventional wisdom says I won't improve. But I don't want to take the chance of very high-risk surgery and find myself paralysed. You are left with the choice someone else must take over."

Assisted suicide is illegal in Britain and friends or relations who help someone take their own life face prosecution. Anyone who aids or abets a suicide faces a maximum prison sentence of 14 years, although there have been few prosecutions in recent years.

Mr Spector added: "It is best for my family in the long term. If the law was changed I would not have gone when I did." A Bill to change the law, tabled by Lord Falconer, was approved by peers when it was tabled, but it ran out of time

for further debate. Lord Falconer has said he will attempt to bring the Assisted Dying Bill back in the new session of parliament.

Sarah Wootton, the chief executive of Dignity in Dying, added that Mr Spector's case showed the need for a change in the law: "No one should be forced to travel abroad to have the death that they want, yet sadly one Briton a fortnight is doing so in the absence of an assisted dying law in the UK," she said.

Mr Spector, who was married with three daughters aged 15, 19 and 21, had been diagnosed with what doctors described as an incurable cancerous growth more than six years ago.

He admitted he appeared to be "jumping the gun" and ending his life prematurely, but described himself as a "walking time bomb". He delayed the trip to Dignitas until after his youngest daughter, Camryn, had taken her GCSEs.

Speaking of his decision to go to Dignitas, Mr Spector told the *Blackpool Gazette*: "You don't just wake up and think, 'I'll do it'. It has to be a collection of consistent thoughts, without peer pressure."

In new extracts from the interview, he said: "I looked at different forms of radio therapy and finally underwent surgery in 2009. [The doctor] did not even attempt to remove the tumour because it was too dangerous. I woke up thinking it would be out, but he told me he could not even take a biopsy." Mr Spector, who ran a number of advertising companies, had a surgical procedure to try and relieve the pressure on his spine. But the tumour continued to grow.

He added: "Had it been lower down the spine and I lost the use of my legs, I would have been distraught but I could cope. Where it was meant total paralysis from my neck down. The condition got worse and I made my decision to go to Dignitas."

Mr Spector's family said yesterday that they had been "overwhelmed" by the support they had received from friends and the public. But Baroness Finlay, a doctor and professor of palliative medicine at Cardiff University, said: "Assisted suicide is a dangerous distraction from improving end of life care for all"

## FOR Never judge until you've worn their shoes

My late husband Tony always said the terminally ill were the lucky ones, as they knew their suffering would come to an end.

Tony suffered a brainstem stroke that left him unable to move or speak. All he wanted to do was take his life, something he was not able physically to do. He just wanted what you or I have the right to do.

We could have gone to Dignitas, but Tony did not see why he should go. He wanted to die at home with his loved ones around him. There is also the small subject of the thousands of pounds that Dignitas costs.

Jeffrey Spector sounds so much like Tony. He did not want to end up in a situation that Tony had to endure every day, and I can understand so well why he did what he did.

We have always said that those going to Dignitas go far too early as they have to go whilst they are physically able. If assisted suicide were legal here people in this situation would be able to spend longer with those they love and not have to cut this very precious time short because of this barbaric law.

One thing that Jeffrey said really hits home: never judge someone until you have worn their shoes. Tony used to say this over and over. Many of the self-righteous pro-lifers have no idea what it is like to wake up day after day unable to speak or move.

There are those who do cope, and good luck to them, but people such as Tony and Jeffrey did not want to live like this and should not be made to do so.

Our case is now with the European Courts. I want the law to change and not just for the terminally ill, as Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill would do. His Bill would not have helped Tony. Whilst it is a step in the right direction it is not far enough.

My heart goes out to Jeffrey's family but I hope that the realisation that he is no longer suffering is if some help. I know it helped me.

Jane Nicklinton

## AGAINST A terrible indictment of our culture

When Jeffrey Spector, a 54-year-old businessman, was told he had a tumour on his spine, he decided to "jump the gun" and book himself into Dignitas. He sought to die at the clinic in Zurich before the cancer paralysed him.

Mr Spector's story is the desperate tragedy of a man who could not bear to live with a less-than-mobile body.

The father of two waited for his younger daughter to complete her GCSEs before booking himself into Dignitas. I cannot help wondering what lessons she is drawing from his decision: that life as a disabled person is not worth living; that love is not enough to sustain us through challenges like losing our faculties; and above all that there is no hope. Mr Spector had no faith in medical advances that might find a cure for his condition, or in the possibility of attaining a spiritual state of peace and acceptance.

Mr Spector asked the world not to judge him. No one should - but I do think he misjudged his family when he said that he chose death because it was better for them.

His survivors have been robbed of chance to enjoy his company and to show their devotion to him. As for the rest of us, Mr Spector clearly felt we are incapable of offering assistance, respect, and compassion to a man paralysed by a tumour. What a terrible indictment of our culture.

Christina Odone