

## Suicide and the law

Sir, Louis Blom-Cooper, QC (letter, June 4) regards the decriminalisation of suicide under the 1961 Suicide Act while maintaining the crime of assisting suicide as either anomalous or unfair. It is neither. The reason for the change was humanitarian, arising

from a deeper understanding of suicide by 1961: before the Suicide Act those who had failed in their attempt could be arrested and charged essentially for not killing themselves. The recognition that those attempting suicide needed help rather than punishment was the basis of the change. The criminalisation of assisting suicide maintains society's concern over the serious nature of suicide. This underlines the Hippocratic Oath and its prohibition of suicide and assisting suicide: "I will give no deadly drug to anyone nor will I counsel such."

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