

or



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 1 London Bridge Street, London SE1 9GF

# Keir Starmer and the Assisted Dying Bill

Sir, While director of public prosecutions, Sir Keir Starmer showed considerable skill in devising guidelines that ensured both that vulnerable people were protected from coercion and abuse at the end of life and that compassion was shown to those who acted out of love in assisting others to end their lives.

His support for the Assisted Dying Bill (report, Aug 29) puts this careful balance in jeopardy with no achievable outcome other than facilitating some individuals at the cost of placing many thousands of vulnerable people at risk.

We know that where assisted suicide is permitted, many terminally ill people become concerned that the natural processes of dying might make them a burden to their families and carers, and this becomes a factor in their decision to seek assistance in ending their lives.

Since the introduction of the Death with Dignity Act in Oregon, 40 per cent of those who have ingested lethal drugs cited this as a concern, with the figures for Washington State reaching 60 per cent in 2013.

Terminally ill people deserve to be surrounded with love, compassion and care; not called to make a choice between dying prematurely and being a burden. The only effective safeguard against this pressure is to keep the law as it is.

These and other considerations have led disability rights

organisations, the medical profession and many faith bodies to support the current law. High profile endorsements of the Assisted Dying Bill and snap opinion polls ought not to replace careful analysis of this complex life and death issue.

JAMES NEWCOME  
 Bishop of Carlisle, and lead bishop on health care issues for the Church of England

Sir, The support of Sir Keir Starmer for the Assisted Dying Bill is significant and welcome. In my view the Bill certainly should become law. Opponents express the fear that, if passed, it will prove to be a slippery slope. I certainly hope so. Desirable though the bill is, it goes nowhere near far enough.

Having recently celebrated my 80th birthday, I naturally give thought to what the next decade or two might hold for me. Two of my family who are in their nineties are in care homes. One is mentally fully aware but physically unable to look after herself. Her eyesight is too poor for her to read or watch TV. She tells her many visitors that she wishes she had died at 92 when she was still living alone. The other has dementia and is incapable of doing anything for herself. A doctor could not say that either would die within six months, so neither would qualify for assisted dying under the terms of the Bill.

I have no desire to end my days like

either of them. I see no reason why I should not now, while physically fit and in full possession of my faculties, be allowed to sign a legal document that empowers my doctor to end my life if I become incapable with no hope of recovery.

DAVID TERRY  
 Droitwich, Worcs

Sir, Reform of the law on assisted dying is long overdue if we wish to retain our claim of being a civilised society. Having recently been through the legally available method when attempting to achieve a good death for a loved relative in the UK, I know that the present process delivers an extended, tormenting and undignified end. The existing route of withdrawal of supporting treatments leaves the individual to die by sequential organ failure due to imposed dehydration; this is a highly unpleasant and inhumane process for all involved. A civilised society would clearly give better legal options and improve the present barbaric practice.

DR CHRISTOPHER MORTON  
 Blockley, Glos

Sir, True compassion for the end of life is shown by the hospice movement, and it requires greater support from everyone, including parliament.

DAVID THOMAS  
 Beckenham, Kent