

Doctors switched pacemaker off to let woman die

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A woman with a heart condition died after she asked doctors to turn off her pacemaker, in what is thought to be the first "assisted dying" case of its kind in the UK.

Nina Adamowicz died last October after undergoing a series of medical examinations and psychological tests to determine whether she understood the ramifications of her request.

Ms Adamowicz, who was from Poland and had lived in Britain for more than 30 years, suffered from hereditary heart disease and was fitted with her first pacemaker in 1996.

For a decade the remedy worked but she then had a heart attack and her health declined. By late 2014, her heart was working at 10 per cent capacity.

She gave an interview to the BBC in January last year, when she was 71, saying that after the pacemaker was first put in, "it improved my life" and "I was grateful for being given extra time".

However, in recent years her heart had grown weaker and the discomfort had grown stronger. She described the sensation of her heart stopping at night as "quite a pleasant feeling" only to be awoken by the "disappointment" of the pacemaker jolting it into action.

Ms Adamowicz told the BBC that it was like being "in line for execution and being told 'not yet'".

"I don't want to go through those near dying spells. It's not about 'I want to die'," she said. "I'm dying."

She added: "I feel that [there is] life, and death is the other side of the

same coin. I'd like to know what is there."

Her doctor, whose name is not known, and her local hospital trust's ethics committee agreed to switch off her pacemaker after the medical examinations and psychological tests.

After gaining her doctor's approval, Ms Adamowicz went into her local hospice with her family and chatted as her doctor turned off the pacemaker. The procedure took 20 minutes, according to *BBC Magazine*. She described her body as feeling heavy and said she felt a little nauseated but added that she felt at peace. She slept through the night, returned home in the morning and died that night.

Campaigners said that the case raised moral and legal questions over assisted dying, which is still illegal in the UK, and might leave her doctors at risk of prosecution.

Davina Hehir, from the campaign group Dignity in Dying, told the *Daily Mirror*: "The law is clear. A mentally competent adult has the right to refuse medical treatment, even if that decision will result in their death.

Pacemakers use electrical pulses to keep a heart beating steadily. More than 35,000 were fitted in Britain last year. They differ from implantable cardioverter defibrillators, another common device, which send pulses only to correct abnormal heartbeats.

Depending on the circumstances, euthanasia is regarded as either manslaughter or murder and is punishable with a maximum penalty of up to life imprisonment.