

# Prosecutions in assisted dying cases dropped after law relaxed

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POLICE and prosecutors are increasingly turning a blind eye to cases of assisted dying despite a steady rise in the number of reports, figures suggest.

While it remains illegal to help someone end their life, recent guidance issued by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) means charges are now only brought in the most extreme of cases.

Only four people have been prosecuted in the past seven years and no one has been brought before the courts since 2014.

While prosecutors deny a change in approach has ushered in "euthanasia by the back door", figures suggest there has been a steady increase in the number of cases of assisted dying being recorded by the authorities.

Information obtained from police forces across England and Wales found that over the past six years a total of 83 cases have been reported.

The statistics have risen steadily during the period, from single figures between 2010 and 2013, rising to 17 in 2014 and 23 in 2015.

The CPS guidelines were first amended in 2009 and updated again in 2014 after legal challenges to the law. In 2015 MPs voted overwhelmingly against changing the law to allow doctors to help terminally ill people to die.

However, pressure from the public

in recent years has seen a softening of the law to stop cases being brought against people involved in mercy killings with their loved ones.

Prosecutors stressed that people would not be brought before the courts in situations where a victim had made a "voluntary, clear, settled and informed decision" to end their lives.

Figures released by the CPS show that since 2010, four fifths of cases referred to it by police were dropped. While some may have been due to a lack of evidence it is thought the majority were because it was deemed not in the public interest to bring charges.

Despite the rules being relaxed, more Britons have been travelling to Switzerland to end their lives at the Dignitas clinic. Last year alone, almost 50 British people died at the clinic, where the law permits assisted dying.

Campaigners for assisted dying insist the current law still prevents terminally ill people from ending their lives in the manner of their choosing.

Thomas Davis, from Dignity in Dying, said there was evidence that hundreds of Britons were killing themselves at home each year, but the fact only 83 cases were recorded suggested the law was not being implemented.

He said: "If police and prosecutors feel the law is ethically and practically near impossible to implement, MPs should sit up, listen and change it."

Daily Telegraph 14<sup>th</sup> January 2017