

Waiting to die

SIR – One of my mother's oldest and dearest friends is in a nursing home, aged 96. She had a stroke a few days ago and is in "end-of-life care", having opted for no medical intervention.

My mother has vascular dementia and is also in a nursing home. Because I have power of attorney over all her affairs I have also opted for no medical intervention, knowing that this is what she would want. However, I wonder if everyone knows the true meaning of "no medical intervention". It means not only no medical treatment or hospital admittance, but also withdrawal of food and water. The nurses are not even allowed to moisten the patient's lips.

When I visited my mother's friend yesterday, I found her unable to move or speak. However, I know that she could hear me, because when I spoke to her she clutched my hand. I told her to squeeze my hand if she was in pain or frightened, and she did so. It could be a number of days before her death.

I am unable to understand why medics aren't allowed to administer a drug such as morphine that would render the patient unconscious, to ensure a pain-free and peaceful death. The law should be changed.

Louise Broughton

Bowness-on-Windermere, Cumbria