

Assisted dying law

Sir, Contrary to the assertion by Lord Carlile of Berriew, QC (letter, Feb 12), there has been a shift in medical opinion with regard to the desirability of legalising the option of a physician-assisted death for a competent patient who seeks relief towards the end of a difficult terminal illness. This was confirmed by a well-attended meeting on February 9 at the Royal Society of Medicine on "Choice at the end of life", which examined the evidence for law reform in those countries that had decided to legalise assisted dying. For example, we heard that support from the Californian Medical Association in 2015 led directly to California legalising assisted dying, and that there had been no evidence that this had disadvantaged the vulnerable.

Lord Carlile points out that in the 2015 medeConnect survey of 1,000 GPs in England and Wales, only 14 per cent of those who responded said that they would be prepared to consider a request for assisted dying. However, the same survey shows that 34 per cent were either strongly supportive (8 per cent) or supportive

(26 per cent), with a further 20 per cent neutral to the proposal that assisted dying should be legal. Indeed there has been no "aggressive campaigning spin" but rather there is good evidence that British doctors are becoming more supportive of a change in the law.

SIR TERENCE ENGLISH, FRCS
Oxford

7 May 15.2.18