

Bishop: let patients die and save money

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It is a waste of NHS money to keep people alive for too long, a Church of England bishop has said, suggesting that doctors could let some patients die a "good death" and save resources.

The Bishop of Kensington, the Right Rev Graham Tomlin, opposes euthanasia but said that for those who believe in the afterlife, death was "not the worst thing that could happen".

Writing in a blog post to mark the 70th birthday of the health service, the bishop said: "Christians believe in the possibility of a good death, and so can set limits on the offering of care, believing that there comes a point when it is no longer wise or caring to prolong life.

"Because Christians can look death in the eye as a defeated enemy, they do not regard the sustaining of life at any cost as the ultimate goal, and this provides grounds for limits to healthcare spending, while seeking to continue to offer the ideal of healthcare for all."

He said that the church should defend the NHS, citing the example of William Temple, the Archbishop of Canterbury from 1942 to 1944, who called for the creation of a welfare state.

"Questions of costings, budgets and decisions of how much treatment to

fund and to whom are of course complex, and difficult to resolve," the bishop wrote. "The NHS is potentially a bottomless pit, and some limits need to be set on healthcare spending."

Asked for examples of when prolonging life was not the best course of action, he said: "I do not support the practice of euthanasia, or any deliberate shortening of life. And ... I am certainly not saying that a belief in resurrection will enable the NHS to save money.

"My point is that there have been a number of recent cases, such as Alfie Evans or Charlie Gard, where doctors have taken the view that nothing more can realistically be done to prolong life and therefore decided to withdraw attempts to sustain life at all costs, and that is difficult for parents and carers."

He added that the Christian belief in eternal life could help in such cases, explaining: "Letting go of those who are dying is difficult, and a belief in a life beyond this one can help people do this."

He also wrote that the power of healing through prayer should be embraced by the NHS, arguing that examples of miraculous healing are "rare but real".

The bishop, who serves in west London, has spoken separately of the need to reform the housing sector so that homes are seen as places of shelter and community, not commodities.

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