

Safeguards in nations where euthanasia is legal

SIR - Lord Carlile (Letters, February 7) asserts that if the law changed to allow voluntary euthanasia, in line with the wishes of 80 per cent of the public, it would affect "the sick and the vulnerable" as well as "the determined few".

In the nations and states that permit assisted dying (such as Switzerland, Holland, Belgium and Oregon), there are explicit systems in place to ensure that the vulnerable are not pressured into ending their lives.

My sister ended her life in the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland two years ago (she was terminally ill with mesothelioma and wished to avoid the very unpleasant end-stage of that illness). Before being allowed to proceed with her request, she was twice interviewed by a doctor at the clinic to establish that her request was her own, that she was mentally competent and that she had freely resolved to die. She had to provide evidence of her condition and much other paperwork. These two meetings took place in Zurich. The first was shortly after her diagnosis; the second, 10 months later, was 24 hours before her death.

Of the many British groups now campaigning to change the law to something like the Swiss model, there is complete agreement that no pressure should be placed on those

who might feel themselves to be a burden to others or who are confused or clinically depressed.

My sister died peacefully, with music by Thomas Tallis playing. Our only regret was that we would much rather have been in England.

Robert Farrer

Berkhamsted, Hertfordshire

SIR - When considering the results of a recent poll asking family doctors for their stance on assisted dying (report, February 5), it is important to remember that it was commissioned by the pressure group Dignity in Dying, formerly known as the Voluntary Euthanasia Society.

It is thus no surprise that the wording of the poll uses emotive phrases ("suffering unbearably") and euphemisms ("the choice of assisted dying"), which could appear designed to produce the desired response.

Legalising physician-assisted suicide would constitute a major change in the criminal law. When surveying professionals who would be expected to play a major role - namely supplying their patients with lethal drugs in order to bring about their deaths - there is a need for clear language without the sugar-coating so beloved of campaigning groups.

Dr Idris Baker

Swansea

D. Tel. 9. 2. 2019