

Doctors take Royal College to task over assisted dying

By Laura Donnelly

A GROUP of doctors has launched a High Court challenge against the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) over what they say is a “radical change” to its position on assisted dying.

The college announced in January that it would poll 35,000 members and fellows on whether the law should be changed to permit doctor-assisted dying. It also asked whether members would be prepared to “participate actively” if the law changed.

The RCP now faces a legal challenge over its decision to adopt a “neutral” stance unless the poll finds a 60 per cent majority for or against.

The college’s current position opposes assisted dying, following a 2014 vote in which 44 per cent voted against.

Doctors David Randall, Dermot Kearney, Kathryn Myers and Adrian Treloar, all RCP members or fellows, have launched the challenge, calling for the decision to be quashed. They argue the decision was taken by the college without consulting members.

The RCP says it cannot be subjected to judicial review because it is a membership organisation and not a public body, and is not “exercising a public function” by surveying members.

In court papers lodged yesterday, lawyers for the doctors said the issue of legalising assisted dying was “one of the most controversial and morally contentious issues in medicine”.

They added: “[Some] had not been consulted on this radical change of approach. The decision has caused significant upset and controversy.”

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