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Assisted suicide

Sir, Melanie Reid (Notebook, Scotland edition, Jul 1, and thetimes.co.uk) claims that existing UK law “forces people to stay alive when life is unbearable”. This is not the case. Any patient within the UK is granted self-determination through the right to refuse treatment. If someone is nearing the end of their life and wishes to die, they can choose to stop further treatment, and the healthcare professionals who are involved in their care must ensure that they do everything to make their death dignified and peaceful.

As a result of the high standards of end-of-life care, the UK has been rated as one of the best places in the world to die.

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Sir, Melanie Reid’s assertion that our present law on “assisted dying” is “cowardly and inhumane” misrepresents the position. The law as it stands safeguards highly vulnerable people. It distinguishes between

individuals who are maliciously motivated to assist with suicide and those who reluctantly assist someone to die, in extreme circumstances. An average of only 15 cases are referred to the Crown Prosecution Service each year and prosecutions are extremely rare.

She also asserts that existing UK law “represents a basic failure of justice”. It is worth remembering that some of the countries that have legalised “assisted dying” have allowed patients with conditions such as anorexia and clinical depression to be euthanised or assisted with their suicide. Where is the justice in that?
Lord Carlile of Berriew, QC
House of Lords