

Right-to-die campaigner ends life at Dignitas

Jeremy Watson

A former teacher who campaigned for new laws on assisted suicide after being diagnosed with a terminal illness has died in Switzerland.

Richard Selley's widow, Elaine, said her husband died "very peacefully" yesterday lunchtime at a Dignitas clinic with her and his brother Peter at his side. In a blog post, Mrs Selley said: "The end was dignified and calm, exactly as Richard wanted. He had taken control of his own destiny."

Mr Selley, 65, from Perth, former head of the junior school at Loretto in Musselburgh, had motor neurone dis-

ease diagnosed four years ago, leaving him unable to walk, talk or swallow.

He wrote about feeling like a "prisoner" in his own body and had been campaigning for a change in the law so that people with terminal conditions can end their lives at home when they choose to.

In a final video message, Mr Selley called on members of the Scottish parliament to support a future assisted dying bill.

"I think the momentum for a change in the law is growing," he said. "It will be too late for me, but I hope that sometime soon people in my position will have the choice to have a peaceful

death at a time of their choosing." Mrs Selley said that she would continue to "fight for the human right of those who are terminally ill to choose how and when they die in Scotland".

"The experience of travelling to Switzerland will never leave me," she said. "It was traumatic. No one should ever need to make that journey from a supposedly humane and compassionate country like Scotland."

The care provided by the Dignitas staff was "exceptional", she said. "There are so many safeguards in place to ensure that people are not in any way being coerced to end their lives." Two interviews on separate days with a

doctor had been very thorough and demonstrated that stringent safeguards were in place, she added. "I have no doubt that any coercion would be detected. This is contrary to what the opposition voices to assisted dying argue in Scotland."

She added that she wanted to thank everyone who had supported the couple. "I know that Richard found great solace in the knowledge that he had made a difference to so many lives," she said. "His writing allowed him to communicate his innermost thoughts and feelings and gave him a sense of real peace. He left nothing unsaid and I am immensely proud of everything he

achieved." A memorial service will be held later this year.

The Catholic Church, which is against assisted suicide, has called for increased funds for palliative care to help patients such as Mr Selley rather than new legislation on assisted dying.

Anthony Horan, director of the Catholic parliamentary office, said that any move towards introducing euthanasia would be a "dangerous statement" by lawmakers.

He said: "Legalising assisted suicide puts immeasurable pressure on vulnerable people to end their lives prematurely, for fear of being a financial, emotional or care burden on others."