

A Private Member's 'Assisted Dying Bill' is being debated in the House of Commons in 2015, which, if passed, would allow doctors to prescribe medication to end a patient's life.

PTHC fully understands the compassionate argument for some individuals to want to end their own lives and feels deeply for the distress they experience. We also equally fully recognise the range of views across society and respect the right of everyone to take an individual position.

The request for assisted dying can arise as a result of a patient's suffering, worries about loss of dignity, or the fear of being a burden to loved ones. However, PTHC's experience of providing end of life care for over 35 years demonstrates that good palliative care can greatly improve people's quality of life when living with, and dying from, a terminal condition and can alleviate many of these very real fears.

We do not therefore support the Assisted Dying Bill and do not believe it will improve the quality of care, life and death for the population as a whole.

We are also concerned that by introducing a law that legalises the active step to end life, it would mark the start of further changes, going beyond terminally ill people, and lead us back to the debate about assisted suicide in a broader sense.

We find it significant that the medical profession is also against the Assisted Dying Bill, as demonstrated in recent statements from all the following organisations (and in some cases, supported by membership survey results): British Medical Association, the Royal College of Surgeons, the Royal College of Physicians, the Royal College of General Practitioners, and the Association of Palliative Medicine.

The Assisted Dying Bill would not be in the best interest of patients, their families or society as a whole. A change in the law, introduced to enable patients to have the *right to choose* when they die would, we believe, result in some patients feeling they have a *duty to die*, in order to prevent them becoming a burden to their family or a drain to society.

We believe that offering assisted dying at our hospice would have a detrimental effect on the therapeutic relationship and trust we have with patients and their families. As an organisation whose sole purpose is to neither hasten nor postpone death but to support patients at the end of life, and their families, we do not consider that assisted dying has - or should have - a place within the range of care we provide.

If the Assisted Dying Bill were to become part of British Law, a small number of patients may choose to have control over their own death. PTHC will respect their right to choose and will not abandon them. We will continue to provide the same compassionate care to these individuals and their families. But we also have a choice, so we would not participate or assist in any efforts that intentionally hasten death through physician assisted suicide.

A change in the law allowing assisted dying in hospices, or other environments where similar care is delivered, would, we believe, have far reaching repercussions in terms of public understanding of, and support for, hospice care. It will lead to confusion and mistrust of what hospice care actually is, which would cause distress and fear to many more people than it would help. This may mean that many, who could benefit from hospice care, refuse to be referred to our services and therefore deny themselves the opportunity to receive appropriate support and care.

PTHC – in common with other local hospices across the UK – relies on our local community to enable us to provide high quality end of life care. PTHC's local community fundraises 80% of our £9.5m annual costs and more than local 1,000 people volunteer for PTHC, supporting over 250 members of staff. A change in law to introduce assisted dying would seriously challenge all of this and, in turn, threaten to undermine local end of life services.

We recognise that there is much to do within our country to improve end of life services but the Assisted Dying Bill is not the way to achieve this. Independent of the Private Member's 'Assisted Dying Bill' is a separate 'Access to Palliative Care Bill', which calls for more equitable access to palliative care for all. PTHC supports the 'Access to Palliative Care Bill', as we believe that good palliative care should be routinely available to all who need it. This would improve the lives of thousands, rather than the tens or hundreds that any change to the law about assisted dying would benefit.

As the 'Access to Palliative Care Bill' would benefit many more people than the proposed 'Assisted Dying Bill', we believe this is where the focus of the politicians, commissioners, clinicians and legislators should be focused.

PTHC's position has, at its heart, the words of the founder of the modern hospice movement, Dame Cicely Saunders:

You matter because you are you, and you matter to the end of your life.
We will do all we can not only to help you die peacefully,
but also to live until you die.'