

To the Senate committee,

I am writing to express my strongest objection to the Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008. Having worked in nursing homes, I know something of the pain and misery that accompanies many people in their last days. Whilst no-one wishes to see people endure pain, euthanasia is not the answer.

My key concerns are summarised below:

Once legalised, euthanasia cannot be adequately controlled and results in the murder of patients who have not requested to die. Studies conducted in Holland and published in the *Lancet* and the *New England Journal of Medicine* between 1991 and 2003 have shown this to be true.

The “right to die” can easily lead to a sense of one’s “duty to die”. Vulnerable people – those who are elderly, lonely, depressed, disabled or distressed – will feel pressure, whether real or imagined, to request an early death in order to avoid being a burden to others.

When euthanasia is available it becomes a form of treatment, although it is exactly the opposite of that! Doctors should never have the right to determine that a life is futile (and thus deserving termination) even if all the treatment options available would be futile in that person’s situation. No life is worthless, even if disabled or dying.

In our current society, with the crisis in the various state health systems, there is a very real concern over health costs. It is always cheaper and quicker to kill than to treat and consequently, legalised euthanasia could easily become the preferred treatment option of those concerned about health costs.

Furthermore, once legalised, it becomes an acceptable treatment for an ever-increasing list of treatable, non-terminal conditions such as depression. Whilst we must address the health care crisis, destroying people’s lives is not the solution!

Legalised euthanasia adversely affects the patient’s trust in their doctor.

Published medical studies have shown that vulnerable newborns are at risk of lethal injections, even where the law is restricted to euthanasia being available only for competent adults.

The second part of the Rights of the Terminally Ill (Euthanasia Laws Repeal) Bill 2008 gives the ACT and the NT the right to legislate on euthanasia. These are small territory assemblies with no upper house of review and only 17 members in the ACT and 25 in the NT. Such small legislatures with no upper house should not be given the power to make decisions on a life and death issue such as euthanasia.

So, if euthanasia is not the answer –what is? Essentially, far greater resources should be put into high quality, easily accessible health care. Our communities should continue to show – in ever-increasing measure – compassion, support and solidarity with those who are suffering. Though death comes to all, there is no right to die. Rather, we should continue to vigilantly uphold the right to life.

Yours sincerely,

Samantha Bryan