

SUBMISSION TO HEALTH SELECT COMMITTEE INVESTIGATING ENDING ONE'S LIFE

Honourable members of the Health Select Committee, thank you for the opportunity to comment.

I anticipate that the advocates of euthanasia/assisted suicide will place much emphasis on freedom of choice. They will argue that they are not imposing their views on anyone, but only allowing choice.

We all agree on the need to protect personal freedoms. But, as legislators, you are well familiar with the need also to prevent, by appropriate legislation, the harm that can result for others as a consequence of individuals' choices. We limit choice in order to make the roads safe; we circumscribe freedom of speech to prevent incitement to hatred or disorder; we limit freedom of choice to prevent unfair trading practices and unfair employment practices, and so on. In other words, it is recognized that the right to individual freedom is not absolute, but is limited by the needs of the common good. It seems to me that the advocates of personal choice in the matter of helping people to kill themselves are not having proper regard for the common good.

Assisted suicide – whatever the specific reasons given for it, or the provisos surrounding it - affects the common good in several different ways: first, just by the fact of being made legal, it will seem that suicide is within the parameters of what is normal and acceptable, and that in some circumstances a person's life matters less. When that becomes part of people's thinking, they will have less incentive to help the terminally ill and others diagnosed with irreversible conditions. We will have become a different kind of society.

Nor is there any true parallel with the very different matter of *allowing* people to die by withdrawing life support in some circumstances. This only amounts to allowing nature to take its course. Intervening to *kill, or to assist in the killing of*, someone is quite a different matter.

The subtle pressure legalized assisted suicide puts on the aged and disabled to remove themselves in order not to burden others is a well-documented reason for people choosing suicide in countries where it is already legal. Further: the relationship between patients and medical staff is also affected – in both directions: for patients who feel less sure they can trust the medical staff, and for the staff who will have the additional factor of patients' mistrust to deal with in trying to care for them.

The Committee will have before it well documented evidence that testifies to these harmful consequences of legalizing assisted suicide. My purpose in this one-page submission is limited to highlighting the relationship between personal choice and the common good. One-sided emphasis on personal choice regardless of its negative consequences for the wider community is simply unacceptable in this matter, just as it is in other areas of life. We need to be consistent, and the more so because we are talking about people's attitudes towards human life itself. I respectfully urge that assisted suicide NOT be legalized.

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