

Honourable Minister of Justice,

I am writing in respect to Bill C-14. In the first instance, I wish to commend the Committee for not including minors and people with mental illnesses in this bill. However I maintain some concerns about the bill.

1. Having taken the Hippocratic oath, doctors are entrusted by society and informed by their consciences to heal, to preserve life and to provide comfort. They have a singular dedication to this. To now allow them, and in some instances require them to kill, goes against the very grain, both of the doctor's calling and thousand of years of sane and humane practice. It is a requirement that turns the tables on a successful, healthy and compassionate civilization. It is something that has not been seen in any country or civilization from the beginning of time. Do we really want to take this route? Who will be able to trust their family doctor any more? The message we convey to eager medical students who have responded to the call to help people is dubious at best, chilling at worst.

2. Every provision must be made to ensure that doctors are not asked to work against their sacred and firmly held convictions regarding the sanctity of life and their calling to preserve life and promote healing. They should under no circumstances be asked to refer patients to another physician or facility that will do the killing. By doing so they will be complicit in the act of killing. It may send some of our experienced physicians into early retirement or voluntary exile into another country. It may deter prospective ethical and moral young people from taking up the profession. It may attract people into the practice of medicine who are amoral or God forbid, possessing undesirable qualities. All this can lead to a deterioration in our health care system - a system that needs all the help it can get at this point.

3.If society feels that people should be given the right to take their own lives, perhaps the government should set up an alternate cadre of personnel who are willing to do this. This should be totally independent of the medical community. Thus the two functions, that of preserving and promoting life and the desire for society to end what is perceived as a miserable existence will be kept separate.

4.More importance should be give to end of life support for the many who suffer chronic pain and other indignities. This very important, seemly underfunded service should be provided with more resources. This will go a long way to minimize the cry for assisted death.

I write as a physician who has been in the active practice of medicine for 49 years, 42 of which has been in Canada. I am a neonatologist and am acutely aware of the challenges involved in end of life care.

I trust that you and the government will be able to process this very difficult subject with wisdom and compassion.

Abraham Ninan M.D., F.R.C.P.C.,
Neonatologist,
Saskatoon Health Region
and
President,
Emmanuel Hospital Association Canada