

My right to physician assisted dying

Executive Summary

- Every adult should have the right to assistance with dying from a physician.
- Advanced dementia and Alzheimer's should meet the definition of "grievous and irremediable medical conditions that cause enduring suffering".
- Every adult should be able to specify, while they are of sound mind, future situations in which they will receive assistance with dying.
- There should be reasonable safeguards to ensure an adult's decision to die has been made carefully and responsibly.
- Providing assistance to those who wish to die will not put us on a "slippery slope".
- Those who have religious objections to assisted dying should respect the rights of others who do not share their objections.
- It should be legal for physicians to provide assistance with dying to those who request it.

Key points

Every adult should be able to get assistance with dying from a physician. Others may not want this right, but for me this issue is simple.

It is legal for me to commit suicide, so I already have the legal right to end my own life.

If I want to exercise this right, I should be able get assistance from a physician. Depending on my health at the time, this assistance could be giving me (or prescribing for me) a drug (such as pentobarbital) that I can take to end my life, or it could be administering a drug to me if I am incapable of taking it myself, to ensure I die peacefully.

My family history makes it likely I will suffer from dementia or Alzheimer's. The full onset of either of these, or a similar condition, should be understood to meet the definition of a "grievous and irremediable medical condition that causes enduring suffering", regardless of whether or not I am in physical pain, or have only a short time to live. I want assistance to die before I can no longer recognize my family, and have to be fed, bathed and looked after by others in a medical or long term care facility.

I have a representation agreement that specifies the circumstances in which I should receive assistance with dying. It should be legal for a physician to provide this assistance in the specified circumstances, even if I am no longer of sound mind at that time.

Safeguards to ensure my right to assistance with dying is not misused or abused could include requiring me to meet with a doctor or psychiatrist to ensure I am not clinically depressed, and requiring a waiting period of several weeks between my request for help to die, and that help being given.

Some argue that giving me the right to get assistance with dying would put us all on some kind of "slippery slope". As long as it is always my decision, clearly expressed, and subject to reasonable safeguards, to end my own life, this is not a valid concern.

Some people believe for religious reasons that no one should ever make the decision to end a life. I respect the religious views of others in this matter, but I do not share them. They do not have the right to make decisions for me. Their views should not affect my right to assistance with dying.

Conclusion

It's legal for me to end my own life. It should also be legal for someone to help me, if I request that help.

I urge you to develop options for changes in the criminal code that would allow me to get assistance with dying from a physician, if I choose to do so.

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