

I am 89 years old and asserting that an individual should have the freedom to choose to end his or her life, especially if experiencing suffering which he or she regards as intolerable and which cannot be relieved by any other means which the individual finds acceptable. This is not limited to physical pain, but includes mental and/or emotional distress.

The mentally competent old, like the mentally competent young, are perfectly capable of making sound decisions about their own care.

Arguably, more so than the young, who do not know what being old means.

There are laws (driving, drinking etc.) where there are restrictions on people under the age of 16,17,18. Why not a law giving free choice to people over the age of 75, as well as the terminally ill, to ask a willing physician to assist.

The only safe way of accomplishing this peaceful end is with the assistance of a physician willing to help.

I understand that to ensure that it is a free choice, there must be regulations built in. To answer the fears that the option would be abused, I draw a parallel with narcotics in society. Some people abuse narcotics - but they are not banned outright. They are regulated by laws governing their accessibility for use as analgesics.

To support my appeal, I attach a description of three instances in which the lack of this help caused, or is causing, great emotional stress.

I submit also that the expense to the health care services in these cases was and is pointless.

- Argument supporting physician-assisted death.

1) A retired professional, a friend of over 50 years, was diagnosed with Alzheimers in his 80th year. While still functioning, and aware of the prognosis, he expressed to me his wish that he “could die now, so my family can remember me as I was and am, and not what I will become”. This option not being available, he deteriorated until he could no longer recognise any family and was placed in an institution where he lived for many more months.

2) A retired nurse, also a friend, went blind in her 93rd year, and her hearing was deteriorating rapidly. She became more and more frail, and needed help to bathe, dress and feed; her mind stayed lively throughout, and she suffered great frustration at her helplessness and boredom. She lived on until age 97. Many times during those years she said to me “I wish I could go to sleep *knowing* I would not wake up”.

3) A personal appeal - my own situation:

I am 89 years old, and have outlived all my siblings and old friends.  
 I cannot care for animals so was forced to euthanize much loved pets;  
 I cannot manage to keep house for myself; I am lucky to live in a “Retirement Residence” in which accommodation, meals and staff are all good.  
 I am in the best situation available to me, but :

Like almost everyone who is old, I suffer from a number of ailments which are painful and/or very physically uncomfortable but not terminal. Enough medication to suppress these discomforts would result in suppression of mental energy and awareness, thus worsening the quality of life even further, to a “zombie” existence.

*I do not want to live through a long, slow decline, but would like a quick, peaceful end, at a time of my own choosing.*

This is a totally different issue from “palliative care” which, of course should be available to those who choose it .

At present, there are only three options for ending one’s life:

a) refusing all food and drink. This can take up to 3 months to death, and would entail much suffering, and expensive care during this time.

b) attempting to overdose on what medications are available. There is a good chance that a person acting without professional help, would get it wrong and end up, still alive, with a damaged brain.

c) a violent end, off a bridge, in front of a train, etc. Most humans are reluctant to be so violent, and also it would cause distress to others, and public expense. I do not accept the allegation that the option to choose death would be “elder abuse”. I notice that most of the groups who make this assertion are made up of much younger people - 30 to 60 years younger. This is a big part of old people’s problems - that we are not listened to. Believe me, these well intentioned younger folk have absolutely no conception of what it feels like to be old, losing control of life, and lonely. Organized “activities” and well-meaning volunteer visitors do NOT take the place of dead siblings and old friends. I consider it “elder abuse” to *deny* us this right to a free choice.

It is the “right to choose” that we are asking for.