

VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING — PALLIATIVE CARE

Statement

HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan) [5.28 pm]: This time last year I spoke about a friend of mine who was suffering from a brain tumour. We are actually coming up to the anniversary of his death. My friend John passed away on 29 June last year. He was 51 and was due to turn 52 later in the year. He left behind a wife and two children—Mateo is now six and Maia is now four. They are both at the Bayswater Rugby Club right now, so I give them a shout-out. They play rugby, because that is what they wanted to do after their dad died.

Hon Dr Steve Thomas: A fine sport.

Hon LORNA HARPER: So he tells me, but as I am Scottish, I know that because Scotland has a very good rugby team.

I have been thinking about it a lot recently. As members can imagine, the family and I have been talking about John. We all miss John. He was a really good friend. As my colleagues here will know, I spend a lot of time with his two darling children, who come and stay at my house and keep me on my toes. They also know about the effects that the disease that John had can have on people and those around them. I am aware of another person who is suffering from the same disease. If members look at my Facebook page, they will see that I have a link to a charity that is raising money. A glioblastoma is a brain tumour that forms in people's heads. The treatment is horrific and the outcome is always terminal. These diseases that we have in society are heartbreaking. Anybody with motor neurone disease or a tumour of this kind—anybody with a life-ending disease—knows that their time is coming close.

In thinking about that, I recognise that on 1 July this year, it will be a year since Western Australians have been able to access voluntary assisted dying. Not everybody believes in that and that is fine. People are opposed to it and that is their right, but there are a lot of people who are very thankful that they will be able to make that choice. Voluntary assisted dying is a choice. It is a choice that somebody faced with end-of-life decisions gets to make. As a society, we have moved to a point at which we allow people to make a decision about how and when they will end their life when they know they have potentially less than six months to go and a very painful death coming up. Up until about March this year, over 100 people had made that choice in WA. I give a shout-out to those families. We understand your pain and the pain that this choice would have caused for you and your loved one. We understand the pain it would have caused for the families. I also give a big shout-out to all those who work in palliative care for the job that they do in helping people at the end of their lives. Our thoughts go out to all doctors, nurses and medical practitioners involved in end-of-life matters. We have to remember every day the families that have lost people to these diseases. As we talk about things in here, we have to think about them. I think especially of Mateo and Maia and other children who are growing up without family members because of these diseases.

Members: Hear, hear!