

18 October 2017

The Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices  
Legislative Assembly Committee Office  
Level 1, 11 Harvest Terrace  
West Perth WA 6005



Honourable Members

**RE: Inquiry into the need for laws in Western Australia to allow citizens to make informed choices regarding their own end of life choices**

**General Position:**

I believe that our current laws in Western Australia on Advance Health Directives and Enduring Power of Guardianship already make sufficient provision for citizens to make informed choices about their end of life options.

I do not support changing State laws to provide for voluntary euthanasia or physician-assisted dying as I have some deep-seated concerns about possible abuses against the elderly, the disabled and those with mental illness, in particular.

**Personal insights:**

My late step-father contracted Alzheimers disease some 12 years ago. He also suffered from Type 1 diabetes, which exacerbated the progress of this disease, to the stage where he entered a nursing home for full-time care 18 months after diagnosis, some six months before he died.

At one point during that six months, he was admitted to hospital for treatment of other physical issues. Because he had already made his wishes known with an Advance Health Directive, the family were able to inform the treating doctor that he wanted no "heroic efforts" made, should he suffer a cardiac arrest during treatment. He recovered and passed away quietly, without pain, in dignity and peace a few months later. My mother was able to grieve his loss, knowing she had done all she could for him and without feeling in any way that she was "responsible" for his death by asking a physician to hasten his demise.

We look to physicians to uphold the Hippocratic Oath of "first do no harm". To destroy the trust of the doctor/patient relationship by putting the onus of conscience for killing another human being on the physician is a serious thing. In some European countries where euthanasia is lawful, there have been a number of shocking abuses by doctors against elderly patients and no doubt there will be more, whilst such laws continue. I have read instances of elderly patients in hospitals being euthanased to "free up beds". Is this the sort of society we really want here? Most of us will get old one day! Is that what we have to look forward to? What fear it will produce in ageing people being admitted to hospital!

I agree that cases of illegal killing are the exception, not the norm, but why do we need to risk such abuses in Western Australia? The current provisions of the Advance Health Directive and Enduring Power of Guardianship ensure that individuals can make their wishes known about end of life measures and with good palliative care, they do not have to be in pain as their body fails.

A second personal insight: Two much-loved and valuable members of my family suffer with Bi-Polar Disorder, which during a period of ill-health can result in deep clinical depression. During that time, they feel that life has no joy, no purpose, no hope which sometimes leads them to say they wish they were no longer living.

With medication and good care from mental health professionals and support from the family, these black moods lift after a few weeks and life is once again worth living as they once again take up their creative interests and social interactions as before. Sir Winston Churchill suffered from periods of deep depression and yet he continued to inspire and lead his country through the Second World War.

**I am deeply concerned** that if we change the laws on assisted dying for the elderly, no doubt further changes could eventually be made (as has happened elsewhere) to widen the scope to include people with disabilities and mental illness. A Bi-Polar sufferer in a depressed state or a young mother with post-natal depression may say that he/she "wants to die" which could then well be interpreted by a doctor as that person's true desire, with dire consequences. **This is not proper care for people with mental illness! With one in every five Australians suffering from mental illness at some stage in their life, we need to tread very carefully when tinkering with euthanasia laws.**

It's my heartfelt belief that we must always protect the vulnerable and infirm in our society. For that reason, I submit that no changes be made to our current laws as there are far more protections for vulnerable people now than if euthanasia is ever legalised in our State.

Thank you for your consideration of my submission. I am willing to appear before the Committee, if you deem it helpful.

Submitted by:

Mrs Sherryl Stiles, private citizen