

Mr Andrew Devitt

22 October 2017

Attention: Principal Research Officer, Dr Jeannine Purdy
Joint Selection Committee on End of Life Choices
Legislative Assembly Committee Office
Level I, Harvest Terrace
West Perth, WA 6005

Dear Dr Purdy,

SUBMISSION to the Joint Selection Committee on End of Life Choices

Here is my submission to the Joint Selection Committee on End of Life Choices, inquiring into the need for laws in Western Australia to allow citizens to make informed choices regarding their own end of life choices.

My general position can be summarised as follows:

1. I believe that practices currently being utilised within the medical community to assist a person to exercise their preferences for the way they want to manage their end of life when experiencing chronic and/or terminal illnesses, including the role of palliative care, are sufficient.
2. I do not support changing state laws to provide for voluntary euthanasia or physician assisted dying.

I hold this position for the following reasons:

- a) In regards to current medical practices, my wife has worked in a WA palliative care facility and has discussed with me that the terminal care she has witnessed in such facilities meets the needs of those at the end of their lives. She has advised me these facilities allow people to die with dignity and peace.

Personally, I have seen my grandfather and great uncle die in recent years in non-sudden deaths. From what I saw, adequate care and options were provided to these two men to help them manage their end of life with dignity and comfort/support. Life is precious and should be encouraged and supported as much as possible; despite being in a wheelchair and on heavy medication, my great uncle was able to attend my wedding not long before his death. Despite his situation, he had a very good time and we were all thoroughly blessed and privileged to have him present.

I note that best practice palliative care options should look to be continuously improved and most importantly made available and promoted to all Western Australians.

- b) In regards to not supporting changes to state laws to provide for voluntary euthanasia or physician assisted dying, I reinforce that life is precious and should be encouraged and supported as much as possible. This includes people who are sick, old and dying; why is there life less important? and less worth living? These are the vulnerable and need to be protected, supported and encouraged the most.

I am a young man with a chronic pain condition, I'm doing moderately okay now, but was in a bad state a few years ago. I spent six months almost entirely bedridden, my family would put food, water and medication directly into my mouth for me and when I felt I could manage, they would help me change my clothes.

I have been in a lot of pain and discomfort, and been very weak and vulnerable. I have a strong personality and had the support of an excellent family as well as friends. However, I could see/feel that in my situation many would have turned to suicide, not to mention if the level of support I had was lower.

I now work part-time, and am married and live with my wife in our own house, I hope to have a family one day. Now, I may not have fallen into the initial bracket of people that it would be deemed okay for them to die, however, as has happened in other jurisdictions, I could see this bracket easily extending to encompass those in my circumstance.

Regardless of whether my situation would be in a "deemed okay to kill" category or not, I have experienced being in a very vulnerable and powerless position. It would not be possible - and I challenge any man or woman who says it would be - to draft euthanasia/assisted dying laws that would have adequate safeguards to protect vulnerable people. It is just not possible, the risk of both active and passive coercion cannot be removed.

Finally, it is the easy and cheap option to kill/euthanise these vulnerable people that need our support and care. The harder, more expensive and more compassionate option is to care for them and help them live a full as life as possible, with as much comfort as can be provided and the dignity due to all. We cannot in good conscience take the easy and cheap option with our most vulnerable people, it is wrong and undermines one of our societies core principles - life is precious and we should not kill each other or encourage/facilitate vulnerable people killing themselves.

I respectfully request that my submission be taken into consideration by the Joint Selection Committee members. Feel free to contact me via telephone, e-mail or address mail if you have any questions or would like to discuss my answers further.

Yours faithfully,

Mr Andrew Devitt