

With respect to the End of Life Choices Enquiry I am strongly in favour of voluntary euthanasia as a legal option. We have compassion about ending the lives of suffering pets. Why in WA do we deny this to humans even though they may be begging to die?

Some people say that only God has the right to decide when we die. Frankly many people don't believe in God anyway so this has no relevance for them. I observe that we have been created as intelligent beings capable of choice. That is inherent in our design so obviously something we are meant to use in our development and surely this would include decisions about when and how we die. I think God has more pressing matters.

I would suggest that it is most appropriate to adopt a human rights model of voluntary euthanasia as opposed to a medical model which can put doctors in a difficult conflict situation and gives them too much power. Every person should have the right to a peaceful and dignified death at a time and place of their choosing having explored and negated other options. Such a person should not have to be terminally ill but simply to view their existence as no longer having any real quality of life (however they would define that) or to have reached a point where they see a future where they will be robbed of their quality of life eg a diagnosis of dementia/alzheimers.

No-one should be forced to suffer terribly in life or death. As the law currently stands in WA it is not illegal to take your own life but it is illegal to assist someone to suicide carrying a penalty of life imprisonment. This forces desperate people to end their life alone, often using terrible methods like hanging and leaving an awful legacy for the friends and family who must deal with the aftermath. Instead there could be a beautiful gathering with the departing person leaving peacefully surrounded by their loved ones. There are methods like the use of the drug Nembutal which could provide a reliable and peaceful death.

Some people talk about palliative care as the panacea for people who are terminally ill but palliative care cannot help everyone even in the area of pain control where it is the most successful. Palliative care can do little for things like extreme weakness or constant, extreme nausea. I would recommend the viewing of the DVD "35 Letters", the story of 31 year old Melbourne writer

Angelique Flower who died horribly in palliative care vomiting up faeces due to a totally obstructed bowel. Angelique had obtained Nembutal but in the end was unable to use it because of a sudden, rapid deterioration in her condition. If voluntary euthanasia was legal Angelique could have had a peaceful death.

My personal experience relates to the mother of a friend of mine who was in a facility in Perth for people with very advanced alzheimers. Her mother was in bed all the time and showed no response to anyone. The one reflex she still had was the ability to swallow and so she was fed daily, being kept alive as a 'living vegetable'. When my friend said to the matron "My mother would never have wanted this" the matron replied "None of the people here would ever have wanted this but we have to feed them by law". What is the point of this? Where is our compassion?

These are more extreme cases but many people would probably also have experienced as I have, elderly relatives who have repeatedly said that they wish to die. They may not be terminally ill, but people reach a point where they become tired of living – tired of the rounds of medical appointments, procedures, surgeries and all the ailments from loss of sight to arthritis to incontinence. Why should we force them to stay alive?

An Advanced Health Directive is not a substitute for a comprehensive voluntary euthanasia option. It details life prolonging treatments that a person can opt in advance to have or not have in certain circumstances such as serious, life threatening injury. It really applies only to treatments where death is otherwise already very imminent and can still be a very unpleasant and obviously will be a very medicalised process.

Of course there have to be some safeguards but I believe a compassionate, caring society would honour and respectfully facilitate a person's wish to die when they feel their time has come in a humane and loving environment. In the end it should be down to that person and nobody else's business.

Yours sincerely

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