



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON END OF LIFE CHOICES IN THE ACT

Ms Bec Cody MLA (Chair), Mrs Vicki Dunne MLA (Deputy Chair), Ms Tara Cheyne MLA,
Mrs Elizabeth Kikkert MLA, Ms Caroline Le Couteur MLA.

Submission Cover Sheet

End of Life Choices in the ACT

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Ms Bec Cody MLA
Chair, Select Committee on End of Life Choices in the ACT
Legislative Assembly for the ACT, GPO Box 1020, CANBERRA ACT 2601

7 March 2018

Dear Ms Cody

Re: Submission to the Select Committee on End of Life Choices in the ACT

I take this opportunity to express my strong opposition to the legalisation of voluntary assisted dying. My views are based on my strong belief in the importance of valuing life in all its forms as well as my own experience of my mother dying from lung cancer and my dad's life in old age.

Anyone who has experienced the death of a loved one from lung cancer will know it is not a quick or painless death. My mum suffered from the disease for two years before she died. They were a very special two years for her, for her children and husband. Time to say all the things that needed to be said, time to show how much we loved her and appreciated all she had done for, and given to, her family and friends. She spent the time putting things in order and preparing for her death. Towards the end, she told dad that she was ready to go, that she had put her world in order and could now die in peace. She never asked to end her life. The last few weeks were extremely difficult for us, but she was provided with daily care from palliative care nurses, her GP and, when she did enter the hospice, 24-hour care 100 per cent focused on ensuring she was comfortable and not in pain. We had a saying while she was dying ... 'Today is a great day because you are here.' I miss her every day and we all treasured every day we had with her – including the time we had when she wasn't conscious but with us still.

My Dad is now 81. He is fit and well and living a full life but misses mum. Her death changed his outlook on life. He said 'things' no longer had value. He finds value in his children and grandchildren and experiences.

I believe the legalisation of voluntary assisted dying alters society's expectations around what constitutes a normal death. It allows a seed to be planted in every elderly person that assisted dying is a viable way to end their life. Irrespective of the strict limits placed on access to voluntary assisted dying, I doubt many will be aware of those limits. The act of legislating dying will be generally understood as 'you can end your life if you're old and or sick if you want to'. It will affect normative change in society's expectations around 'a good death' and add suicide to our understanding of what that is. By planting that seed in the expectations of elderly people and society generally, it shifts the source of the question as to whether someone wants to die from the person dying to everyone around them – it empowers those around a dying person to ask if that person wants to die. Legislation makes it OK to ask that question. I believe this change will increase the pressure on dying people to take that option because the legislation has created an expectation.

Human life in all its forms, along all its stages, should remain treasured, cherished. Death need not be painful, we have the means to manage pain. Death should always be dignified. We have the means to ensure it is. Of course, doctors, with families, make end of life decisions every day. Providing them with greater legal certainty is different to legalising suicide.

My mum didn't ask to die. She did suffer the knowledge that her life was ending and she did suffer physically. While she was ready to die, she wanted to be with us for as long as she could and we wanted her to be with us for as long as she could. While there may be a very small number of people who would have preferred to commit suicide at the end of their life, the step of legalising suicide has ramifications for **all of us**, not just the very few who's deaths are extremely difficult and who want to end their life early.

Please, do not legalise voluntary assisted dying.

Prudence Gordon