



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON END OF LIFE CHOICES IN THE ACT

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Submission Cover Sheet

End of Life Choices in the ACT

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The Committee Secretary

Select Committee on end of life choices in the ACT

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I am making this submission because I believe the ACT Government should NOT legalise euthanasia. Over the past five and a half years I have lost 5 people (3 family members and 2 friends) and although the circumstances of their deaths were different in each case (home, aged care facility, hospital and the hospice) they all died with support and dignity. I have also, in the last 15 months, personally had to face my own mortality through breast cancer and this has made me consider the end of life question very seriously.

If, as a community, we are serious about addressing this issue, we need to consider what is available and how resources should be used to promote and support palliative care both in the hospice and in the home.

Education

We encourage people to have a Will and Power of Attorney but other than in the Aged Care sphere there seems to be no general discussion about death. End of Life care plans are available in nursing homes and they provide an excellent opportunity for families to discuss the needs and wishes with their loved one long before it is required. As everyone will eventually face death, the discussion needs to be available with appropriate resources so that stigma and misinformation is minimised. The information should be readily available so people are aware of the support for people (and their families) facing terminal illness and death.

Resources

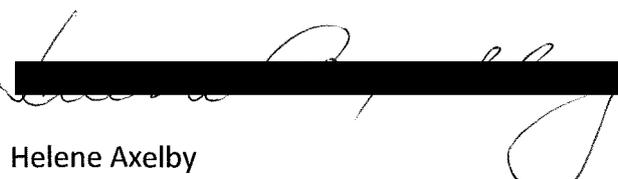
The ACT Hospice does an amazing job of looking after the needs of the dying (a quick glance at the Canberra Times every week will confirm this) so they should be resourced with staffing and beds to meet the needs of the community. Not all jurisdictions have a system that works so well and I have observed that at first hand with a family member. There is a general idea, especially amongst young people, that people die screaming in pain. Good palliative care and an understanding of how it works in pain management, is essential. There is a need to ensure that access to the hospice and other support services are funded at an appropriate level and through discussion with the relevant health professionals.

Medical professionals

There is a danger that medical professionals will be subjected to pressure to conform if the law were to be changed. In every other aspect of medicine doctors and nurses work tirelessly to support/save life and they may have strong reservations about administering drugs to end life. Recently in Germany doctors have refused to support a new euthanasia law.

Having supposedly strong protections in place does not guarantee that things will go as planned or intended. With the best intentions, these things can become eroded and the impact over time is likely to be totally different from what was originally envisaged.

Finally, nobody in our community should be made to feel that they are a burden because of illness or age and we should work to protect those who most need our protection.



Helene Axelby