



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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From: [REDACTED]
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I , have had a recent direct experience of being with a dying relative, my brother, and I have found that the end of life experience of this person who was in palliative care was a positive experience both for the person and for our family.

My brother died of cancer that was very painful, because it had spread to his spine. It was very difficult to manage the pain, and it never left him , until he was in palliative care.

Before that the pain was managed with drugs, and for a period of time doctors experimented with an electronic device to help him manage. This was not as good as the standard opiates because he was in hospital. He preferred being at home where the nurse visited him. He managed with opiates at home and sometimes, he could even go out for brief periods. However these days became shorter. His pain increased . So my brother chose to go into palliative care. The palliative care doctors and nurses handled him with great sensitivity. The family were constantly with him. Some members of the family thought he might still recover enough to leave palliative care, some people do. He was on a drip which covered the worst of his pain and he was able to shower and eat and talk normally.

However about four days before his death, he started to gradually slip into unconsciousness, he stopped eating, but was sometimes, still trying to speak. He was not in pain. On the Wednesday, about 2 days before his death his fluid drip was removed to stop any build up. He was still breathing, but had stopped trying to communicate.

At this point the palliative care doctor on duty , came in and spoke to his partner and myself . He was very sensitive, and rather than declaring that my brother was now in fact dying, he asked us what we thought was happening, and we acknowledged that as we could see his body was shutting down, that he was dying now. There was no pain at the end, and my brother was in the best environment he could be when he finally stopped breathing at the end of the week.

Death is usually a process. It is rarely sudden. Everyone was very caring of him AND of us. I would highly recommend palliative care at the hospice in Canberra to any person with a dying relative. It is a great institution. The atmosphere was wonderful and the staff are the most humane people I have met and exemplars of the medical principle ' do no harm'.

I urge the committee to consider an increase in funding the hospice as the optimum in end of life care in the A.C.T. and not to introduce legal euthanasia, a dangerous practice which can only lead to abuse as it has in Belgium and the Netherlands. We are very well served by the hospice in Canberra , where people are not kept alive unnecessarily, but rather treated with sensitivity and compassion as they make their final journey , and where their relatives are given the opportunity to understand and come to terms with the gradual process that is death.

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