The Commons Health and Social Care Committee Inquiry into Assisted Suicide ('Assisted Dying')

The House of Commons Health and Social Care Committee has launched an inquiry into assisted suicide. There is very little time to respond as responses must be received by 20 January. However, there is a very short online form of just six questions which should not take more than ten or fifteen minutes to respond. Please have a look at it and forward it to anyone you know who may be sympathetic.

Question 1 sets out the law, and asks whether you broadly agree with the law on this issue in England and Wales.

Question 2 asks you to explain why in no more than 300 words. With so few words it is good to focus on the main reason for supporting the current law, i.e. the main danger as you see it, in legalising assisted suicide. Use your own words and, if it is appropriate, appeal to your own experience, as a healthcare professional or as a carer or as someone who suffers from chronic illness or disability.

Question 3 asks which factors are most important when considering the issue. Choose two or three.

Question 4 – If you want to add a third factor under "other" this might include the:

- negative impact on suicide / suicide prevention;
- negative impact on palliative care services / the culture of palliative care;
- potential reduction in financial or social support for disabled people;
- danger of a 'slippery slope' from terminal to chronic physical to mental illness or disability;
- abuses due to a tick box mentality as happened under the Liverpool Care Pathway or in Mid-Staffordshire.

You will need to give a very short explanation in your own words.

Question 5 asks if a "Citizens' Assembly", further independent research, or a referendum would be helpful to the debate, or if some 'other' option would help. It is very important to answer this question and NOT to tick "Citizens' Assembly" or "Referendum". The experience in Jersey shows how a Citizens' Assembly (or "Citizens' Jury") can be selected so that it is strongly in favour of assisted suicide or euthanasia and can come up with very extreme proposals – much more extreme than proposals from elected politicians, courts, professional bodies, or broad-based consultations. A Citizens' Jury would be a very dangerous gamble with people's lives.

Question 6 – If you want to add an option under "other" this would include:

- a Parliamentary Select Committee, with more than six weeks consultation (and not over Christmas!);

- a Joint Committee of both Houses including people with expertise in palliative care and who can speak from a disability perspective;
- looking at the evidence that is already there, for example on the websites of the Anscombe Bioethics Centre, Living and Dying Well, or the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Dying Well;
- Having an inquiry about what is happening under the euthanasia and assisted suicide laws operating in Canada, as the United Kingdom is more similar to Canadian society than it is to the United States and what is happening there is very worrying.

If you represent an organisation or have done research in this area then you may also consider writing a longer submission (up to 3,000 words). See further advice here. This gives more scope but is still relatively short so you should not seek to encompass the whole debate but should focus on two or three key points and provide evidence from experience or from published data.

We understand that the issues raised in this inquiry are sensitive and may be upsetting. You may be able to get support or advice from the organisations listed below:

- **Samaritans** – Support and guidance for everyone. Call **116 123**; this is open 24 hours a day every day. Or else you can email **jo@samaritans.org**.
- **The Silver Line** – Support for older people; a free confidential helpline providing "information, friendship and advice" to people aged 55 and over, and support for "older people who are suffering abuse and neglect"; open 24 hours a day every day. Call **0800 4 70 80 90**.
- **Mind** – For information, advice, and support for anyone experiencing a mental health problem. Call **0300 123 3393**.

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