

Written evidence submitted by Reverend Canon Valerie Plumb (ADY0030)

This is very hard for me to write about, but I feel if we want change, we must find the courage to ask the difficult questions regarding moral obligation and more importantly where we place our compassion. I have always found this matter of assisted dying incredibly uncomfortable, until I discovered that I found deep and painful suffering even more uncomfortable.

The last words my mum ever said to me was 'I love you and promise me that you won't let me suffer', even though I loved her so much, I could not keep that promise. My mother died of pancreatic cancer horribly, I nursed her with my sister until she went into a hospice. As we waited for a place in the hospice to come up, we were left not knowing what medical intervention she needed, as she deteriorated, we were constantly on the phone to the doctors and left helpless for hours on end waiting for the district nurses to come and administer medications and pain relief, it was soul destroying for all involved. I won't share the whole tragic story but let me say now that no amount of superb hospice care could ever take away the indescribable look of terror and despair in my mother's eyes as she struggled to sit up just to vomit black sludge. The hospice nurses and doctors were great...but this is not what mum wanted, by this stage she had suffered significantly, and I could not bear it. Whilst still conscious she kept asking me to make it stop, I could not. This was the moment that I got down on my knees and prayed so hard that God would take her because I realised that this wasn't a life being taken, instead it was just **a terrifying existence full of devastating pain, inexplicable suffering, and deep despair... and she deserved better.**

She was a deeply religious woman who throughout that time repeatedly asked if things could be speeded up, because for her heaven was now the only relief.

From that experience I along with others have come to see that assisted dying is not necessarily about shortening life, but more about shortening death and thus reducing any unnecessary suffering. **The most important thing that mum lost before her life and her dignity was choice.**

Over 200 million people worldwide have the choice of an assisted death if they become terminally ill – including 11 jurisdictions in the US, all states in Australia and neighbouring New Zealand and closer to home - Scotland, Jersey and the Isle of Man are all bringing forward assisted dying Bills. So, it concerns me deeply that the rest of the UK is being left behind with unsafe and broken laws which put dying people and their families at risk.

As British people continue to travel to Switzerland to gain control of their death under enormous anxiety particularly as they must go earlier than they want because they must be fit to travel, and in some cases alone as their family and friends may face prosecution on their return.

It's important to remember that there is no law to stop people taking their own life, but there could be a law allowing them doing so under medical supervision in a gentle dignified way instead of leaving them to be found by their deeply distraught loved ones. I understand that recent data from the Office of National Statistics has found that terminally ill people are twice as likely to take their own lives than the general population.

Finally, just to be clear this is not about investment in palliative care, which we all support, but it is a debate about humanity and choice.

Compassion is at the heart of Christianity, and as a Christian I believe that every life is precious.

The right to a good death should be in the hands of everyone, I support assisted dying for terminally ill adults of sound mind in this country simply because we have a responsibility to protect the most vulnerable.

The dying of a loved one is hard enough, but to see them suffer in agony is torture for all involved and no amount of **doing what we think is the right thing, makes it the right thing for that person.**

Dec 2022