

Item of business :

# End of Life Choice Bill

Submission name :

**Mrs Anna Vaatstra**

## Comments

The people of New Zealand have already shown overwhelmingly that they do not want the legalization of euthanasia or assisted suicide during the previous select committee hearings on physician assisted suicide. There are no new or compelling reasons to persuade a change of mind. I continue to be opposed to any change of law that legalizes assisted suicide, euthanasia or mercy killing in any form.

I come from the Netherlands where euthanasia is legal and I have seen the steady progress, in a remarkably short time, from the legalization of voluntary euthanasia with many safeguards to a situation where there have been cases of non voluntary euthanasia forcefully administered, euthanasia administered for any and every reason where life is considered not sufficiently pleasant, comfortable or secure. There is increasing pressure on those who are aged, sick, impaired or dependent to choose euthanasia rather than be a financial or social burden.

This has led to a growing fear and distrust of doctors and medical services. My aged or sick relatives avoided seeking treatment as long as they could rather than subject themselves to pressure to conform to the "new norm" of ending their lives (for the convenience of others.) However it is now an entrenched mindset in the community and people who do not conform are seen as being antisocial or selfish. Sadly some of my relatives ultimately succumbed to that pressure. It is inevitable that it will permeate all areas of the Health and care professions.

The Dutch Government has now begun to close aged care homes and facilities, saying that the responsibility belongs to families. While this seems laudable as an ideal, in the context of the situation in Holland it means that those without strong family support are extremely vulnerable. It is an "elephant in the room" situation. Imagine the anxiety of those who are vulnerable; these people will live their twilight years in fear, marred by insecurity.

We need to remember also that mistakes cannot be rectified and even the will do so will be undermined. Mistaken diagnoses are not uncommon, I'm sure many people have witnessed as much. There are already too many ugly incidents of people waking up after being administered lethal drugs, vomiting and dying in pain and misery.

Giving anyone the power to end another person's life will inevitably erode safeguards. Already proponents of the right to die have infamously made statements that make light of the possibility for error or ulterior motives and implying that the right to die outweighs the individual's right to live. The nature of our community and society will change from one of care and compassion for the weak and needy to being at least careless and becoming ruthless. I wonder if there will continue to be a real commitment to healthcare for the "non productive" and palliative care in such circumstances. History demonstrates that it is human nature to seek the "quick fix".

A nation is judged by how it treats the weak, needy and vulnerable. People grow in compassion, mercy, patience and wisdom when we care for others especially as they suffer. Often those who

witness suffering bear it less well than the sufferers, who more often than not are ennobled by it. However like the Spartans, we will deteriorate in humanity and become ruthless when we only value youth, strength, beauty, ease and perfection.

May God give you wisdom and humility as you consider this grave issue of life and death.

## **Recommendations**

That the law remains as it is.

That emphasis be put to suicide prevention.

That palliative care be improved and readily available to those who need it.