

Assisted Dying Bill

Letter

Sir,

The Private Member's Bill on assisted dying introduced to the House of Commons on Wednesday 16 October presents a dangerous threat to our society. The Christian faith offers a defence of the dignity of life and a call to improve the quality of life for all those living - including those who are dying.

Proponents of this legislation argue that it is intended only for those acutely suffering at the end of their life; however, in almost all other places where such legislation has been introduced, this provision has been widened over time to remove such safeguards. In the US State of Oregon (oft cited by supporters of assisted dying as a "safe" form of the legislation) the provision has been widened to include non-terminal conditions; in Canada assisted dying for the mentally ill will become legal in 2027; in Belgium assisted dying is now available to children. This is a perilous journey for our legislature to undertake. Not only will assisted dying become more widely available over time, it will also become increasingly acceptable.

This risk applies mostly to those in society who are already vulnerable: the elderly, the poor, the mentally unwell, the long-term sick, the lonely and isolated. The option of death should not be put to anyone in society, least of all those already disadvantaged by a culture that seems to value only productivity and success.

The real answer to these issues is multilayered, but must include greater investment in hospice and palliative care, further medical research into effective pain relief and treatment, and support for the families of those who are dying. These concerns ought to be the urgent concern of our parliamentarians, not legislating to provide an option of death for the suffering.

To reduce the value of human life to physical and mental capacity and wellbeing has sinister implications for how we as a society view those who experience severe physical or mental issues, and risks that those undergoing such suffering come to see their life as of less value than others. Once legislation is made, society itself risks coming to see these lives as of less value, too.

We must resist this culture of death by seeking to improve quality of life for all the living.