

From: Catherine Lennon [email address deleted]
Sent: Monday, May 06, 2013 11:38 AM
To: [Deleted]
Subject: Doctors oppose euthanasia VOTE NO Rights of terminally ill bill 2013

Dear Member of parliament

As a doctor I urge you to vote against the bill to legalise euthanasia "Rights of the Terminally ill bill 2013".

The Australian Medical Association and Palliative Care NSW oppose euthanasia. I am a member of the Royal Australian College of General practitioners which promotes Palliative care and excellent medical care but the RACGP does NOT promote euthanasia, suicide or assisted suicide.

The day before Cate Faehrmann introduced the bill to legalise euthanasia she invited two pro euthanasia doctors to NSW parliament 1st May 2013 930am Waratah rm. Neither of these doctors Dr Leaf or Dr Ryan gave any factual evidence, medical references or accurate statistics to show that euthanasia or assisted suicide is "safe". I attended this meeting in person and it was made clear to those present that Cate Faehrmann's bill allows assisted suicide for a person 18 years old or older even if they have depression.

Euthanasia advocate Dr David Leaf spoke at NSW parliament 1st May 2013 and incorrectly stated that the practice of euthanasia overseas is "safe" which means that he has not actually studied the reports that prove people are being killed involuntarily and voluntarily for either physical or mental "suffering". The Journal of Geriatric Internal Medicine Feb 2008 study showed that most doctor assisted suicides in Oregon were NOT requested due to physical pain but most were due to "existential" suffering and some patients were physically healthy.

However Dr Leaf stated that Cate Faehrmann's bill is "the same.... similar legislation to Oregon, Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland". This is again a factual error by Dr Leaf because the laws in each region are quite different eg Netherlands Groningen protocol legalised euthanasia of babies since 2005. Switzerland's Dignitas clinic have assisted suicide of people who did not have a terminal illness eg 23yo Rugby player Daniel James who was paralysed due to a rugby injury.

If this bill passes it is highly likely to result in a huge increase in suicide as has occurred in the Netherlands and Belgium. The Belgium govt reported 2012 that 1,432 died from assisted suicide which is 2% of all deaths and 32% of the deaths are done without request of the patient. Also 47% of deaths go unreported in the Flanders region of Belgium (1) (2)

The experience in the Netherlands is that similar legislation resulted in a high number of patients being killed by involuntary euthanasia (Rommelink report by Dutch govt) (1) and the question of whether a patient should live or die is often decided exclusively by a doctor.

Dr Leaf seems to consider that suicide or assisted suicide is "safe" for patients and misuses the term "dignity" meaning "right to be killed". If someone tried to give you a lethal injection of Nembutal does this mean "dignity" or assisting suicide or homicide.

Dr Leaf also failed to acknowledge that most patients asking for lethal injections or other forms of assisted suicide actually have depression which affects their cognition and usually responds well to treatment and support. (NSW dept health guidelines and Beyond blue)

Dr Christopher Ryan, Psychiatrist was also invited by Cate Faehrmann to speak on 1st May at parliament house. When MP Dr John Kaye asked psychiatrist Dr Chris Ryan whether the psychiatric assessment (in the Bill) would be "repeatable" the answer by Dr Ryan was vague and uncertain with no evidence or specific study quoted. Dr Ryan implied that there could be differences of opinion among doctors and he stated there are no "100% safeguards". In other words doctors know that people with severe depression and suicidality are medicolegally considered to have impaired judgement due to depression- if this bill passes there will be many people with treatable depression or other treatable symptoms or treatable conditions who will be given lethal injections or poison such as Nembutal.

Cate Faehrmann herself at this 1st May meeting admitted there are problems in rural areas with complying with the requirements in her bill for 2 doctors initially assessing patient and then Psychiatrist assessment.

Dr David Leaf (answering Dr Andrew McDonald's question about what drugs would he suggest) suggested the use of Nembutal and omitted to mention the current case of Erin Berg (a young Perth mother with four children) who had postnatal depression.

Erin took Nembutal as instructed by Dr Phillip Nitchkes book (and spoke on the phone to him). Erin had excruciating side effects and died after 10 days in intensive care . Her family are currently suing WA health dept for failing their duty of care to treat her depression.

No euthanasia law can provide adequate protection for the vulnerable.

Doctors, as healthcare providers, are expected to protect and promote life, not end life or encourage the ending of life.

The focus should be on providing excellent medical care, palliative care and other forms of support to patients. Patients already have the right to refuse medical treatment and advanced care directives.

Euthanasia sends a message to vulnerable sick and elderly people that terminating your own life is an acceptable option.

Euthanasia also sends the message to the vulnerable that terminating your own life is a better option than becoming a "burden" on family and friends.

Legalising euthanasia sends a confusing message to people with health problems or depression and the educative role of law means legalising assisted suicide will promote suicide and cause huge suffering to patients, family and friends.

Please protect the vulnerable people in our community by voting AGAINST the "Rights of the Terminally Ill bill 2013"

Yours Sincerely

Dr Catherine Lennon
MBBS FRACGP IBCLC
Member and Examiner of the
Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
Member of RACGP faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

REFERENCES

- (1) www.patientsrightscouncil.org
- (2) www.no euthanasia.org