

View from the House

In the week before Parliament rose in July, the House of Lords, debated the Second reading of the Assisted Dying Bill. The Bill enables competent adults who are terminally ill to be provided at their request with specified assistance to end their own life. The Bill also provides for a person who is terminally ill and has six months or less to live to seek and lawfully be provided with assistance to end their own life.

I am opposed to this Bill and will vote against it if it comes before the House of Commons. The proposal that the taking of a life is to be enshrined in an Act of Parliament, albeit with consent, is alarming. In my view legislation should not be used to legitimise murder or manslaughter. Moreover the active involvement of health professionals in the process is disconcerting. They have a duty to look after us when we are at our most vulnerable.

It does not seem that long ago when Dr Harold Shipman was “assisting” vulnerable people in his care by taking their life. He managed to hide the murder of his patients for some time. Under this Bill two doctors have to countersign the declaration. This puts them in a difficult position and in breach of their oath to “do no harm”. And a Coroner would not have to hold an inquest.

In my view the basic premise of this bill is flawed and should not proceed. I understand that some peers although opposed to it, felt that they would allow the Bill to progress so that there would be a wider debate on the issue.. Recent reports that people were travelling to Switzerland to end their life should not be seen as compelling evidence that this law is needed. There may well be not enough time to debate the Bill once it comes to the House of Commons.

The DPP’s guidelines set out the necessary legal framework without the need for further legislation. It makes clear that a number of factors will be taken into account if it is in the public interest to prosecute a person for taking another’s life in this way.

Following the death of Bob Jones, there is a new Labour PCC, David Jamieson. Tim Oliver’s passing sees a new Labour Administration at Walsall Council. I wish them well in fulfilling the legacy of both who devoted their lives to public service.

Valerie Vaz MP

24 August 2014.