

Health & Environment Committee

SUBMISSION to VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL 2021

In making this brief submission as a Queensland resident and former nurse I would like to thank the Queensland Law Reform Commission (QLRC), the Health committee members and the secretariat, together with all who chose to contribute to this enquiry and subsequent proposed Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) legislation these past three years.

The process has been inclusive and comprehensive as it should be for such a serious yet delicate matter as dying. Commendably, this body of work has been accomplished against a backdrop of COVID which has distracted not only Queensland but the entire globe.

Generally, I am supportive of the content of the draft Bill and note the fact that it differs from those in other states in ways that apply to Queensland.

In particular I endorse the well-considered safeguards, the 12-month expectation-of-death timeframe, conscientious objection by individuals and required Medical Practitioner qualifications.

The ability for medical and nurse practitioners to initiate discussion about VAD within the context of a range of treatment options, which of course should include palliative care, is positive and enables the patient and their family to be properly informed of what is available to them.

However, I do have concerns regarding inducement by dishonesty or coercion, but more along the lines of an ill person being coerced not to apply for VAD.

There has been hostility and deceptively misleading language tossed around by certain groups, religious and otherwise, who oppose giving terminally ill people the right to end their life at a time and place of their choosing.

Coercion is a double-edged sword. Just as it should be against the law to talk someone into VAD it's just, if not more serious, to talk them out of it.

For many dying patients it's an insurance policy that gives them enormous comfort, allays fears of dying in writhing pain, and often times isn't utilised.

Where are the protections against this happening? It is briefly mentioned in the section on Offences but is deserving of more attention.

This brings me to the statement within this draft legislation that Voluntary Assisted Dying is not suicide. I am in agreement with the views of the QLRC on this point.

No doubt large amounts will be spent on advertising campaigns by groups opposing VAD using scaremongering as their weapon. From a legal viewpoint little can be done to stop this even if they peddle untruths.

I hope in my heart that the wishes of the ill patient will be paramount. Palliative Care plays a huge role, but despite the best of care, patient's can and do die horrible deaths as any GP or nurse who has worked in aged or palliative care will attest.

My GP husband and I, during our work as medical professionals, witnessed this first hand. Those who support VAD rightly argue there is no dignity when one loses basic faculties, cannot swallow and wastes away as cancer eats them to a skeleton from the inside.

Families sit around sometimes for days or even weeks as their loved one slips into unconsciousness, waiting for them to die. Why should death be prolonged for those who wish to end it before that stage?

Mrs Jann (Janet) Stuckey
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