



ASSISTED SUICIDE IN THE UK?

Is assisted suicide going to be allowed in the UK without the law being changed?

That's the question that must be asked after the astonishing events of the past few weeks.

Attempting to commit suicide was an offence against the law until 1961. The Suicide Act that year decriminalised suicide, but to "aid, abet, counsel or procure the suicide of another" remained an offence, with a maximum penalty of 14 years in jail.

In recent years, 115 Britons wanting help to end their lives have gone to Switzerland, where assisted suicide is legal. So far no relatives or friends who have accompanied them have been prosecuted in the UK for assisting a suicide because the Director of Public Prosecutions did not deem it expedient.

Debbie Purdy, a 46-year-old multiple sclerosis sufferer from Bradford, decided that was not sufficient. She was supported by the former Voluntary Euthanasia Society, now known as Dignity in Dying. (The euthanasia lobby is fighting for legalised assisted suicide as a first step to legalised euthanasia.)

Ms Purdy wanted a guarantee that her husband would not be prosecuted if he accompanied her to a Swiss clinic. Otherwise, she might have to go earlier, while she was still able to travel alone, which she claimed was an infringement of her right to life.

Pro-lifers said the assisted suicide law was clear and did not need changing. While the DPP had the discretion not to prosecute, the law remained a deterrent to those who wished to assist someone to commit suicide from improper motives.

Lawyers for the Crown Prosecution Service argued there was no specific policy on assisted suicide and no legal obligation on the DPP to publish one.

Not surprisingly, the High Court and the Appeal Court refused Ms Purdy's request. When she took her case, however, to the House of Lords, the highest court in the UK, the law lords took a different view.

They decided the law needed clarification, and instructed the DPP to set out in clear terms when someone will be prosecuted under the Suicide Act. *continued over...*

Page 2

Plea from disabled peer

Page 4

Schoolchildren's 'right' to sex

sept'09

Page 6

'Here's £30 to die'

Page 8

It's time to pray

...continued from cover

Keir Starmer, the DPP, told the Daily Telegraph: *“On the question of whether this is dealt with by Parliament, there’s nothing much I can do to nudge them along. They’re divided, there’s no inclination to change the law, so we have no choice but to produce this policy.”*

But he made it clear that his new guidelines on assisted suicide will apply not only to those who help relatives to die abroad, but also to those who help loved ones die in Britain.

So are one man’s decisions now going to have the effect of changing the law without Parliament?

Mark Mullins, of the Christian Legal Centre, said the law lords’ decision created a “right to die” in law. This was a further departure from the Christian principle that ensured the protection of the vulnerable in the past.

Charles Moore explained in the Daily Telegraph that the European Convention on Human Rights is now entrenched in UK law. UK citizens are now subject to Article 8, which says that “everyone has the right to respect for his private. . . life.”

The law lords had now decided that assisted suicide is “part of the act of living” and therefore related to privacy. *“When you strip away the legal language,”* he said, *“you see that they are merely expressing their own opinions.”*

“So the judges decide that rights which concern life are actually rights to promote death. . . The courts have become a tool for reflecting the elite views of the age, rather than carefully interpreting the laws made by elected legislators.”

Matthew Parris of the Times warned: *“It is one thing for the state to decline, at its discretion, to prosecute someone who has killed without authority. It is quite another thing for the state to issue an authority to kill.”*

Dominic Lawson of the Sunday Times called the euthanasia lobby *“masters of media manipulation.”* The media have certainly had a field day with the assisted suicide issue. The DPP’s new guidance will be anxiously awaited.

The day after the Purdy decision, MP David Winnick announced his intention of proposing a private member’s bill which would allow terminally ill people to have assisted suicide in the UK. Then MP Nadine Dorries announced her intention to introduce a bill strengthening the existing law, thus fighting, she said, *“creeping euthanasia by the back door”* and ensuring any change in the law would be the result of MPs’ vote – *“not Keir Starmer.”*

It seems certain there will be continued debate in Parliament too.

■ **Three weeks before the law lords announced their decision** in the Debbie Purdy case, the House of Lords voted by 194 to 141 against a proposal by Lord Falconer to make it no longer an offence to help someone travel abroad for assisted suicide.

Lord Falconer said it should not be a crime to accompany someone to a place where assisted dying was lawful if your sole purpose was to assist them in going there. A number of peers spoke in his support. Others said the proposed change would lead to abuse.

If it were approved, said the Bishop of Exeter, it would become a milestone on the slippery slope to introducing assisted suicide in the UK by incremental degrees. *“For too many,”* he said, *“the promise of more choice has so often turned out to mean pressure to choose that which suits others.”*

The Lords heard a moving plea not to make the change from Baroness Campbell, who was born with spinal muscular atrophy and is confined to a wheelchair.

Lady Campbell has told elsewhere of a “terrifying experience” when she was rushed to hospital in 2002 with a sudden chest infection and lay in bed as doctors decided her life wasn’t worth living.

Seeing her disability, they thought her a hopeless case. *“You wouldn’t want to be resuscitated,”* they said. It was only when her husband produced a photograph of her receiving an honorary university degree, she said, that they decided her life had some meaning.

She told the Lords she had been told by doctors that her life was at an end, and she could imagine others would come under similar pressure from relatives.

“I tick every box of Lord Falconer’s criteria to die. I could go tomorrow, and believe me, I would have no trouble in persuading two doctors. Three years ago two doctors persuaded me it was time for me to go on my way.”

“It takes extraordinary will to rise above these views, especially when such views are held by loved ones.”

“If this amendment were to succeed I believe it will place a new and invidious pressure on disabled and terminally ill people to think they are closer to the end of their lives.”

“Some will consider death is preferable to fighting for the support to live with dignity. It would be the cheapest, quickest, simplest option. Think of older people who are anxious not to cause their family distress.”

A proposal by Lord Alderdice to legalise assisted suicide in Britain was not proceeded with.

■ **Not all the Britons** who have killed themselves at the Dignitas assisted suicide premises in Switzerland have been terminally ill. According to the Guardian, some have been suffering from conditions like inflammatory bowel disease, tetraplegia and rheumatoid arthritis.

Professor Steve Field, of the Royal College of General Practitioners, said he was “horrified” by the list. Many of the conditions mentioned patients could live with and continue to have meaningful lives. Dr John Saunders, of the Royal College of Physicians’ ethics committee, said the list suggested Dignitas was “cavalier” in arranging for people to end their lives.

The list has prompted calls from doctors to examine the issue of assisted suicide more carefully and to improve the standard of palliative care in the UK.

Research published in the Journal of Medical Ethics last year showed that 21 per cent of people of various nationalities ending their lives at Dignitas had a non-fatal illness.

■ **Retired minister Campbell Wilson**, who is 66 and has multiple sclerosis, is convinced there should be no change in the assisted suicide law.

He was diagnosed with MS 36 years ago, since when his condition has gradually worsened. He is confined to a wheelchair, is no longer able to write, is blind in one eye, can’t concentrate to read for any length of time and suffers from loss of memory.

He was told recently he could live for another 20 years. *“To be honest, I enjoy life so much that I hope the predictions are right,”* he told the Belfast Telegraph. *“I have a wonderful wife, three sons and a daughter who are loving and caring, and three grandchildren I adore.”*

“I have no thoughts of ending it all. I don’t suppose you can preach about the power of acceptance all your life and then buckle when things get tough.”

Altering the law, he said, would carry real dangers for the sick and elderly, making them very vulnerable.

SEX IS GOOD FOR YOU, CHILDREN TOLD

An NHS leaflet being distributed nationally to schools and youth workers is telling school pupils that they have a “right” to an enjoyable sex life and that regular intercourse (“**What about twice a week?**”) is good for their cardiovascular health.

The leaflet, drawn up by Sheffield Primary Care Trust, is entitled *Pleasure*. It is intended to update sex education by telling pupils about the benefits of sexual pleasure. It uses the slogan “**an orgasm a day keeps the doctor away.**”

Critics said distributing it to schools was “crazy,” “incredible” and “unbelievable.” Family campaigners said the leaflet encouraged under-age sex.

Steve Slack, director of the Centre for HIV and Sexual Health at NHS Sheffield, who was involved in writing the leaflet, said it could encourage young people to delay losing their virginity until they are sure they will enjoy the experience.

Said Peter Bradley, deputy director of the children’s charity Kidscape: “*Parts of the leaflet provide young people with ridiculous, irresponsible advice. If the professional messages don’t change, how can we expect young people’s sexual activity to change?*”

Dr Trevor Stammers, of Family and Youth Concern, said the leaflet would encourage risky behaviour and an increase in sexually transmitted diseases. “*I’d like to know what scientific evidence there is to back this up. There are an awful lot of overpaid and under-occupied health promotion officers around who are obsessed with sex.*”

Inciting under-age sex, he said, was “*nothing less than encouraging child abuse.*”

■ **A Government initiative** designed to reduce teenage pregnancies, costing almost £6 million, has been dropped because pregnancy rates among girls on the programme more than doubled. Over three years, social workers, teachers or NHS staff nominated 2,371 teenagers who they thought were at risk of drug abuse and pregnancy to take part in the programme at a cost of £2,500 each. The idea was to persuade the teenagers not to get pregnant by handing out condoms and teaching them about sex.

Sixteen per cent of those on the programme became pregnant, compared with six per cent on other programmes. The programme was also designed to cut cannabis use and drunkenness, but made no difference at all.

The Department of Health funded research to evaluate the programme, carried out by Meg Wiggins, of the Institute of Education at the University of London and Chris Bonell, of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. The research, published online by the *British Medical Journal*, showed girls on the programme were significantly more likely to become pregnant than girls on other youth programmes where contraception and sex advice was not given.

The scheme was said to have failed because it introduced girls at risk of becoming pregnant to promiscuous girls they might not otherwise have met. The more timid girls were more likely to have sex because of peer pressure.

A Department of Health spokesman said “This pilot was based on a successful American programme. It did not appear to reduce teenage pregnancy so we will not be taking it any further.”

■ **While pro-family organisations** are campaigning for parents to continue to have the right to withdraw their children from sex education lessons at school, sex education

charities are pushing for sex education lessons to be compulsory.

Said Simon Blake, chief executive of Brook: “*Our belief is you cannot reconcile children’s rights to high quality sex and relationships education with the parental right of withdrawal. The right of withdrawal needs to be removed.*”

The Family Education Trust said that making sex education compulsory from the age of five, which the Government proposes, would reduce the influence of parents on the content of lessons, because schools, being compelled by law to provide sex education, would have less incentive to consult parents.

Parents would be the less able to keep explicit materials out of the classroom and to object to the Government’s “misplaced” and “counterproductive” promotion of contraceptives in lessons.

Said Norman Wells, the trust’s director: “*There is a definite agenda at work to undermine the role of parents and to tear down traditional moral standards. The need for parents to be alert and vigilant has never been greater.*”

■ **Pupils in schools in South London** are listening to a recording of a brothel owner giving details of the prostitutes under her supervision and a menu of sexual services on offer, complete with prices.

Critics said the recording, obtained by an undercover investigator by phone from a brothel, was inappropriate for boys and girls aged between 14 and 17. One mother said her daughter had been “*more than a little upset.*”

The recording is part of a presentation by Croydon Community Against Trafficking. Said a volunteer: “*One of our main aims is to raise awareness in the community about human trafficking and particularly sexual exploitation. What better place to go than into schools where young people are going to be adults in the community?*”

Hugh McKinney, chairman of the National Family Campaign, said the question had to be asked if this was an appropriate topic for young boys at a vulnerable stage of development to hear in the classroom.

■ **Bournemouth Borough Council** is providing a bus parked on the seafront at Bournemouth offering keyring condom holders and tests for chlamydia to youngsters as young as 13.

Leaflets and educational DVDs are also on offer in an effort to reduce teenage pregnancies.

Critics say the venture not only encourages under-age sex, but advertises it.

Wendy Hodge, who has a 12-year-old daughter, said: “*I want my daughter to maintain her innocence for as long as possible, not be exposed to talk of sexually transmitted disease or be handed a free condom. It is going to put parents in a very awkward position when they have to explain what the bus is there for.*”

■ **The Christian Institute says** few parents are aware of the kind of materials schools are encouraged to use in sex education lessons. Many resources recommended by local health or education authorities feature explicit content and affirm all forms of sexual behaviour as morally equal.

An investigation by the institute found a lesson for primary schools covering anal intercourse, teacher-led discussions on sadomasochism, bondage and sex toys, and a video advising pupils to “*try experimenting with other boys and girls and see who you feel most comfortable with.*”

The Primary School Sex and Relationships Education Pack, currently recommended by East Sussex Council for use with children of seven and upwards, includes explicit definitions of homosexuality, bisexuality, anal intercourse and oral sex.

Parents at the moment are entitled to ask their children’s school what materials are being used.

'HERE'S £30 TO KILL YOURSELF'

In the US state of Oregon, where assisted suicide is legal, people are being denied medicines to prolong their lives and offered £30 to cover the cost of drugs to kill themselves, the Daily Mail reports.

While just over a hundred Britons have gone to Switzerland to seek suicide, 401 people have been despatched in Oregon. Sixty died last year out of a population of 3.75 million – equivalent to more than 800 people from Britain's population – and the figure is rising each year.

The report says although the law covers only the terminally ill, people suffering from depression are being included, and people are able to shop around for doctors willing to prescribe them the lethal dose.

Said Baroness Finlay, a professor of palliative medicine at Cardiff University School of Medicine: "You have to ask why is it that so many people working in palliative medicine in this country see what is going on in places such as Oregon as being so fundamentally dangerous.

"The reason is that we are looking after terminally ill patients day in and day out – and we know how vulnerable and frightened they are."

■ **New rules are proposed** for assisted suicide groups in Switzerland which will stop quick suicides for foreign visitors.

In the Zurich area from this autumn people wanting assisted suicide will have to attend counselling for a number of months and prove they are suffering from a serious terminal illness, severe disability or the after-effects of a serious accident. People under 25 will be

banned from assisted suicide unless they are experiencing severe physical suffering, and the amount charged for assisting will be capped at £283, compared with £5,170 said to be charged currently by Dignitas.

Ludwig Minelli, founder of Dignitas, complained that the plans were directed specifically at his organisation.

■ **The UK Medical Protection Society**, which provides legal advice to doctors, says GPs are asking if they might be prosecuted for assisting suicide if they provide patients' medical records and a certificate of fitness to travel for patients going to Dignitas. They also want to know if they need to tell the authorities if patients plan to go.

■ **Women having repeat abortions** are more likely to be in an abusive relationship, according to a UK study published in the *Obstetrician and Gynaecologist*. Thirty per cent of women having a second abortion reported being in an abusive relationship, and the figure increased for women having a third abortion or more.

A GOOD FRIEND

We want to pay tribute to Joanna Thompson, head of CareConfidential, who has died, aged 60.

Joanna began working in a LIFE pregnancy counselling centre in 1985, trained workers for an independent centre in Southampton and helped establish Christians Caring for Life.

It later became Care for Life, a department of CARE, then CareConfidential, an umbrella organisation with 150 pregnancy centres.

She visited many other countries to train and encourage others, and was a faithful friend to *image*.

We thank God for every memory of her.

■ **Pro-life MPs** have pointed out that organisations pushing for condoms and abortion services to be allowed to be advertised on TV make their money from promoting these things.

The Government's Advisory Group on Sexual Health said changing advertising rules would help lower teenage pregnancy rates. The group includes organisations like the Family Planning Association, Brook and the British Pregnancy Advisory Service, who the MPs say are given major grants to provide contraception and abortion to unmarried young people including under-age children, often without parental knowledge.

BPAS is a registered charity heavily funded with public money. Its published accounts show an annual income of more than £23 million, only £2,000 of which came from donations.

■ **It is claimed that £286 million** pledged by the Government for end-of-life care is not reaching the hospices it was intended for – at a time when voluntary donations are down because of the recession. A number of care trusts are diverting the money. Help the Hospices said Devon Primary Care Trust was keeping the money towards its budget deficit.

■ **Karyomapping**, a new method of genetic testing of human embryos, can detect around 15,000 genetic conditions and provide results in 24 hours. It could be in widespread use within a year.

Critics say it is morally wrong to use genetic testing to weed out imperfect babies, and the new test could be used to create "designer children."

Pre-implantation genetic diagnosis, or PGD, is currently used to check for 60 or so conditions in embryos whose parents are known to have a genetic disease. Tony Rutherford, chairman of the British Fertility Society, said karyomapping was quick and reliable and strict regulation would stop the technology from being abused. It is thought that the Human

Fertilisation and Embryology Authority would restrict its use in the UK to the 60 conditions for which PGD is used.

Josephine Quintavalle, of Comment on Reproductive Ethics, said she thought qualities people looked for had little to do with what makes a loving human being.

■ **Having an abortion** increases the chance of a woman's next baby being born prematurely by 20 per cent, and very prematurely by 50 per cent, according to figures revealed at a conference of the European Society of Human Reproduction and Embryology. Women who had two or more abortions doubled the chances of having a subsequent baby prematurely, and increased their chances of a subsequent baby being very premature by two-and-a-half times. The number of teenagers in the UK having more than one abortion has increased by 70 per cent since 1991.

■ **The number of cases of sexually transmitted infections** in Scotland has almost doubled in a decade. Clinics saw 23,171 cases in 2008, compared with 12,077 in 1998. A quarter of acute cases were in people under 20 years old.

■ **The number of people diagnosed** with a sexually transmitted disease in the North-east of England last year was up again – but not by as much as in previous years.

More than 16,000 people were diagnosed with a new infection at clinics in Northumberland, Tyne and Wear, Co Durham and Tees Valley – an increase of one per cent, compared with five per cent the previous year.

A representative of the Health Protection Agency said there were substantial numbers of people undiagnosed, untreated and unaware of the risk they pose to others.

■ **Spain's Justice Minister** said there was no room for conscientious objection when it came to abortion. Doctors insisted the vast majority of doctors did not practice abortion and would not.

IT'S TIME TO PRAY

In this edition of *image* news you can read some examples of what passes for sex education in this nation today.

Rebecca Hagelin, an American pro-lifer, once wrote something titled Protecting Your Family in a Culture that's Gone Stark Raving Mad.

Unemotional, tight-upper-lipped, carefully understating Brits don't use such "emotive" language. But an NHS leaflet is now instructing children of unspecified age that they have a right to an enjoyable sex life and sexual intercourse is good for their health, and one Brit did say that sending it to schools was "crazy."

Any sensible person would find himself hard pressed to disagree.

It's time to protest. To whom? To the Minister for Children, to your children's school, to your church minister, to your MP and to your local newspaper. And it's time to pray.

The British Medical Association voted at its annual meeting to reject a call for support for a change in the law on assisted suicide. Two-thirds of doctors and a number of doctors' organisations have said they do not wish the law to change. **Thank God for the doctors' position.**

Britain's leading nursing union, the Royal College of Nursing, decided to drop its opposition to assisted suicide and take a "neutral" stance. A nurse's job is to care, not to help to kill. **Please pray.**

■ Seven million babies have lost their lives in this nation since the 1967 Abortion Act.

■ That's more than 10 per cent of the present population of the UK. It's five times the UK casualties in two World Wars.

■ Each abortion takes the God-given life of a human being created in the image of God.

■ The tragic thing is that while this is going on, most of the Christian church is doing nothing.

WILL YOU DO SOMETHING?

■ There will be a **National Day of Prayer** about abortion on Tuesday, October 27, the anniversary of the passing of the Abortion Act.

■ Will you pray on the day?

■ A leaflet about the day with suggested prayer topics is enclosed.

■ Can you gather with your ladies' group, house group, youth meeting, family or friends to pray for this?

■ Can you get other Christians involved? Can you arrange a prayer meeting in your town?

