

Committee Secretary  
Senate Community Affairs Reference Committee  
PO Box 6100  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Sir

**Re : Inquiry into Suicide in Australia**

I only learned of this Senate Inquiry two days ago. Please may I make the following Submission?

My Submission is not applicable to the young and I address the issue of 'Suicide' in the absence of depression, as opposed to 'Euthanasia' for the terminally ill. It is not about hasty decision making. It is about a properly considered and long held philosophical view and rational choice for the aged who possess and use their God given gift of free thought.

Circumstances which cause the young to contemplate suicide are entirely different than those experienced by the elderly. We, the elderly, have fully matured mentally and emotionally, have participated in and observed life's experiences and feel entitled to respect and not patronage. We have almost certainly had more life experiences and possess more wisdom than most of those who make the laws by which we are governed. Significantly, we know life and we know death. We understand that our physical bodies are mere vehicles and like any other vehicle it deteriorates with time and becomes the equivalent of an un-roadworthy automobile.

As a consequence of this perspective we are perfectly equipped to make our own independent and fully informed life/death decisions. Most of us may well choose to remain until every option for prolonging our time here has been completely exhausted. Their wishes are readily accommodated, so why are the rest of us deemed unworthy of respectful consideration?

The purpose of this Submission is to request that our legislators accept and respect each individual's right to determine their own fate once they have lost the independence which previously enabled them to enjoy a full and meaningful life.

Increasingly relying of other people and medical interventions as a crutch is not 'living' nor is inability to participate in everything of interest to us.

On a broader (societal) level, three or four times a week there are lengthy media reports on the 'burden of an aging population'. We drain the national economy through pension benefits, disproportionately use the health and 'social support' services and there is absolutely no prospect of individuals reducing let alone reversing this unacceptable trend.

Some of us have encountered various forms of considerable hardships and had our characters strengthened by the kinds of challenging experiences which the 'typical Aussie' would not imagine, which sociologists are unaware of and which demographers do not record. This is what makes each of us who we are and each of us unique! Once our physical independence and a meaningful life are lost our self awareness is not necessarily obliterated and does not always diminish. Many of us simply will not tolerate a protracted existence of being organized, managed, directed and controlled by individuals who are disdainful of one's person – and we don't all have family connections let alone family ties.

Suicide is not a decision for which one should need to seek anyone else's permission and, unlike active euthanasia, it is not a medical 'procedure'. Indeed, given that medicine and science is not the source of our life an individual's decision to suicide is no business of any medical practitioner/s - nor for that matter any politician!

'Common sense' suicide would serve the best interests of society as well as every individual who chooses it as a preferable option for themselves.

Suicide is not a crime, yet the means of a peaceful transition into the next stage of our existence is apparently illegal. Why is this so? Surely it is exactly the same as lawfully being permitted to travel to a distant location but then being denied any means of safe, effective and comfortable transportation!

What is the reasoning behind this?

It is all rather silly when one can drive their vehicle at high speed into another object or jump from a cliff. One can slash their wrists or throat with a razor blade or wander into shark or crocodile infested waters. Chemical and plant poisons etc are freely available in supermarkets, hardware stores and nurseries and very few households do not have ready access to electricity and water. Is it the intention to deter our resolve with the threat that we'd suffer an agonizing exit which also, incidentally, means a very messy and probably traumatic 'cleaning up' afterwards by others?

I believe society has made its wishes known on this issue - provided that clear and strict guidelines are in place to ensure there are no coercion of the weak and no subtle manipulation of the vulnerable. Too, such provision should only be an option for the aged.

When I used to work night shifts, the only way I (and my colleagues) could cope was by taking a Seconal tablet so that we were able to sleep well during the day. With that experience, I can easily understand why this is considered the most peaceful method of 'self-deliverance'! I request that Seconal (or some other drug with the same characteristics) be made available in a lethal dose to anyone over the age of 65 years who has health problems that significantly and adversely impact on their ability to meaningfully participate in life (by THEIR definition) for their own personal use at a time of their choosing.

I do not want to one day become a prisoner in an unworkable shell then be at the mercy of uncaring, disinterested, overworked and/or understaffed 'professionals'. Nature did not intend my time here to be like that! It is man made laws which deny nature's laws. I have no fear of death. At a time of my choosing I welcome death as a friend - not an enemy. It is the ultimate source of healing - and there comes a point at which the best this life has to offer cannot possibly compare.

For further consideration and historical references, may I draw the Committee's attention to the book entitled 'Common Sense Suicide - The Final Right', by Doris Portwood. I obtained my copy from Academic Reminders in Canberra more than 30 years ago and on checking (Amazon.com) find that it is still available.

Thank you

Yours truly,

(Ms) Pat A Styles  
January 30, 2010