

## Dignity is not the same as choice

Margo Macdonald's  
assisted suicide  
legislation before the  
Scottish Parliament  
asks the wrong  
questions at the  
wrong time

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MS MARGO MACDONALD MSP has re-opened the assisted suicide debate again here in Scotland by highlighting the story of her battle with Parkinson's disease. Given her condition, it is easy to understand why she wants to campaign on this issue and everyone has sympathy for her. However, is this the right time to be debating the subject? Furthermore, is she presenting the issue in the correct way?

Mr Jeremy Purvis MSP, supporter of assisted suicide, has tried on a number of occasions to get this issue debated and has organised his own consultation and public meetings. They proved unsuccessful both with MSPs and with the Scottish public in general. The consultation showed the majority of respondents did not want a change in the law and he failed to persuade enough MSPs to support him, so no Private Members' bill was introduced. Why, then, is another debate beginning? Are those seeking to change the law trying to wear down the Scottish public until they agree with their views? Consultations and public meetings cost time and money. Is this an appropriate way to spend tax payers' money?

Even if the issue is re-debated, Ms MacDonald's starting point is flawed, going against her own core values and all she has campaigned for her entire political career. She talks about choice and dignity and allowing individuals to make their own decisions. Dignity is, in fact, a very difficult concept to define, but surely it is not just characterised by individual choice. Dignity is not an abstract concept, but manifests itself in respecting people for who they are, not their abilities. Persons do not lose their dignity if they suddenly become ill or dependant on others. Moreover, if the law were to change, the concept of an intrinsic human dignity may be lost forever.

Assisted suicide changes what we mean by society and how society works. It reinforces the belief that individualism is good and we are all islands and no one has responsibility for anyone else. Moreover, physicians are not in favour of assisted suicide. They recognise that with such massive advances in palliative care, patients no longer need to experience the physical suffering that many fear with prolonged terminal illnesses. Assisted suicide is a step too far and opens a can of worms that needs to be kept closed.

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