

FRIENDS OF THE SCOTSMAN /

If you are caring for others, remember to take good care of yourself as well

How do you like to spend your weekends? I enjoy clearing my head after a busy week at work with a cycle along the coast followed by an afternoon playing on Portobello beach with my wee boy and catching up with friends. Simple pleasures that, like many others, I'm grateful for but often take for granted.

Through my work with Edinburgh Leisure's Active Communities Team, I'm aware that for the 788,000 unpaid carers in Scotland, 29,000 of whom are young carers, weekends aren't always quite as relaxing.

Caring for a friend or family member can be a full time job. The reality for many carers is that they're so busy with helping the person they care for to wash and get dressed, picking up prescriptions, arranging appointments and picking up groceries, that they have little time for themselves.

Unpaid caring is a key issue of our time and something that affects people of all ages and backgrounds. Scotland's ageing population, with people living longer with multiple health conditions, means that it's only going to become more common for people to take on a caring role at some point in their lives.

Caring responsibilities can understandably take a toll on the carer's health and well-being. It's important that carers take the time to look after themselves too. After all, if you're not taking care of yourself then taking care of others is much harder. One of



Phil Trodden urges all those who look after the sick and elderly to stay active and reap the benefits

the best things that carers can do for themselves is to stay active. As well as helping to prevent and manage a range of health conditions, being active can also relieve stress, improve mood, encourage clear thinking and allow them to meet new people. For young carers looking after a sibling or parent, it allows them to enjoy their childhood and forget about their caring responsibilities.

Being active doesn't need to mean running a marathon or joining a bootcamp. Going for a brisk walk around the block, cycling short journeys instead of driving and doing online exercise classes are simple ways that carers can get active in their own time.

At Edinburgh Leisure, we are a charity on a mission to help everyone in Edinburgh to lead happier, healthier and more active lives. We are proud to provide support to people in the community who face barriers to being active, including carers, through a range of initiatives designed to protect and improve their health and well-being.

We recognise that caring can take its toll financially, with a recent study estimating that more than 300,000

people in Scotland have had to quit their job to care for a relative, so we are committed to allowing carers to access our sports and leisure facilities for free when accompanying the person they care for. Our carers go free policy means that if they want to swim alongside them or attend a yoga class together, they only pay for the cost of the person they care for.

Carers can also benefit from our Community Access Programme, which supports community groups and charities to make physical activity more accessible for the people they work with. We've partnered with two local carer organisations, Vocal and Edinburgh Young Carers, to give carers access to our city-wide facilities without worrying about the cost.

Through the Community Access Programme, we deliver weekly swimming lessons for young carers at Portobello Swim Centre. Since they started in late 2017, nearly 30 young carers have learned to swim. Tina Hedley of Edinburgh Young Carers said: "The young carers we work with don't have the same opportunities to be active as their peers. Before starting swimming lessons, many of them



↑ Caring responsibilities can take a heavy toll on a carer's health and well-being –

had never been to a swimming pool before and were frightened of getting in the water.

"As well as teaching them to swim, the lessons have helped them to improve their mental well-being, become more confident and learn an important life skill. It has been

incredible to watch them find something they enjoy and look forward to each week. Last summer we took them on a day trip to North Berwick and they couldn't wait to swim in the sea and show off their new skills!

"Being active is so beneficial for the young carers we work with and we're

getting out and about, or going to local leisure facilities, can lead to a happier life as well as time for themselves

so grateful to Edinburgh Leisure for giving them this opportunity."

Seeing the happiness that swimming brings to these young carers' lives makes me proud to work for a charity committed to creating opportunities for everyone in Edinburgh to enjoy the benefits of

an active lifestyle. If you are a carer and would like more information on how we can support you, contact Phil Trodden at philtrodden@edinburgh-leisure.co.uk or 0131 548 2100.

Phil Trodden is an Active Communities development officer with Edinburgh Leisure.

Edinburgh Leisure



↑ Richard Selley plans assisted suicide

perceive they are to society. In a cruel twist, possible legislation on assisted suicide, that is designed to empower, may have the effect of eroding the autonomy of the most vulnerable.

I remember, in my previous role, as a junior doctor in Glasgow, I looked after a frail man in his 60s with advanced lung cancer. He had no family save an estranged daughter. We talked about his love for his motorbike and of a time when he was homeless. The nurses were kind and made him laugh.

On the second round of chemotherapy he developed a deadly infection. Had he been too frail for chemotherapy? Perhaps. There was no one to say, 'Dad's not right today'. He would never have complained or asked for

anything extra. We were all he had. He did not respond to our antibiotic treatment and died peacefully a few days later.

I remember sitting with him at the end because there were no loved ones. The nurses had tears in their eyes. Was it a good death? I believe

it was, because even though he had no one else, he had been valued and cared for with respect by the very fabric of society. Would he have accepted euthanasia had it been offered? Maybe! Would he have felt pressurised to opt for doctor-assisted suicide, because no one was affirming the worth and value of his life? Perhaps he would. Pressure is subtle and affected by all sorts of difficult family dynamics, full waiting rooms, tired doctors. Patients feel a burden in all sorts of unspoken ways.

I understand the right for Mr Selley to make his own decisions. Patient autonomy is rightly revered. Doctors should value and respect their patients. They should value their patients' priorities and experi-

ence and expectations. They should remember that they may have lost a grandchild in an accident or cycled round Ireland in their prime. Patient autonomy should guard against the relentless medical agenda of 'this is best for you because I know best.'

But the principle from which autonomy is derived – the respect for another human being – is that which underpins the prohibition of the taking of life. What do we do when taking life clashes with patient autonomy? Ethicists struggle over this in different ways. However, it seems to me, for a community to flourish we must, at times, choose to give up our individual autonomy for the sake of us all.

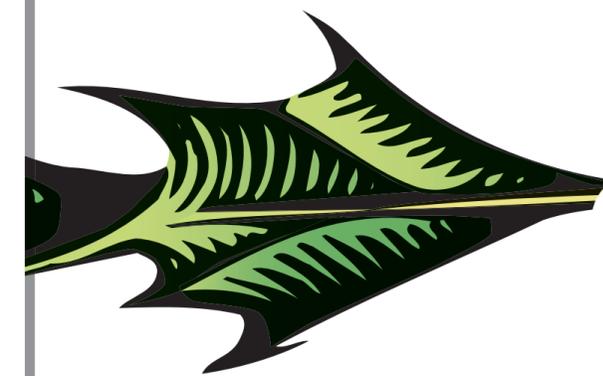
Some individual suffering is terrible as well as prolonged and we question if there is any other way. But the value and worth of all human life must restrain us, as a society, from taking life.

Responsibility to and for others is the very stuff of friendship and family, of the doctor-patient relationship, of society itself.

Dr Gillian Wright, senior researcher at the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics.

Scottish Council on Human Bioethics

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The value of human life should restrain society from taking it

Dr Gillian Wright argues against calls for an assisted suicide law

We have learned in recent days of the personal tragedy and courage of Mr Richard Selley, a former head teacher from Perthshire, as he confronts the late stages of motor neurone disease. He plans to die by means of assisted suicide in Switzerland but is campaigning for the law to change in Scotland to allow assisted suicide here.

I have tremendous respect and sympathy for Mr Selley and his family at this difficult time. The physical deterioration that motor neurone disease causes is deeply distressing.

However, when reading his blog, I have been struck by just how alive he is. The liveliness of his mind, the sharpness of his wit, his eloquence

and grit. In the awfulness of perhaps the darkest time in his life, we are privileged to catch a glimpse of who he is.

Currently the law prohibits the intentional taking of life by an individual or by the state. Why is that? Because of the incredibly high value and worth that society places on all human life, without exception. The primary danger of assisted suicide is that individual lives are devalued by society because they are ill, disabled, confused or that their contribution to society is perceived to be minimal.

The secondary danger is that terminally ill and disabled individuals may begin to devalue themselves because of the burden that they