

Assisted dying should not be offered as a solution to problems we have caused

The example of euthanasia for gender dysphoria in Belgium shows that the desire for death always has a social dimension, writes **Prof David A Jones**



There is a strange and disturbing connection between the Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill, which has recently caused such controversy, and the proposed Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill. In Belgium, assisted dying is provided for people with gender dysphoria. You can be euthanised for being trans.

Nathan Verhelst had an unhappy upbringing. By his own account, "While my brothers were celebrated, I got a storage room above the garage as a bedroom." He was "the girl that nobody wanted". As an adult he transitioned and had hormone replacement and surgery. However, he was dismayed by his appearance after surgery and feared being seen as a "monster". He requested euthanasia for his psychological suffering and in 2013, at the age of 44, he was given a lethal injection. His mother, interviewed after his death, said that "Her [sic] death does not bother me. I feel no sorrow, no doubt or remorse. We never had a bond."

Nathan's case is not unique. A gender clinic in Belgium reported that three of its former patients had applied for euthanasia. One was a trans woman of 62. She was unhappy with the results of surgery. It caused bleeding and other complications which were only made worse by further operations. She also expressed feelings of loneliness most of the time. Since transitioning she had not found happiness in a lasting relationship. Her doctor thought her wish to die was due in large part to social isolation but still approved her euthanasia request.

We know that there is a higher rate of self-inflicted death among trans and gender nonconforming people. Suicidal thoughts can be prompted by intense feelings of gender dysphoria. However, such thoughts and feelings may equally be a response to the experience of stigma, harassment or even violence, to rejection by loved ones, to loneliness or to social isolation. It is deeply shocking that suffer-

ing due to gender identity, which is so clearly influenced by the attitudes and actions of others, should be given as a reason to assist someone's suicide or to end someone's life. It makes their death a solution to problems that we have caused.

The example of Belgium euthanising people for gender dysphoria highlights the need for support for trans and gender nonconforming people to live and flourish and demonstrates the very real dangers of assisted dying legislation.

The reform of the Gender Recognition Act in Scotland should have been the opportunity to signal greater acceptance of trans people in society. Instead, the debate became bitterly divisive. Those of us critical of the drafting of the Bill must acknowledge the need it was seeking to address. Gender identity should not be seen not only in medical terms but also as society's acceptance of a person's sense of self. This acceptance matters.

The proposed legalisation of assisted suicide in Scotland is limited to adults with a terminal illness. However, once a law is passed, it can easily be extended, as Canada shows. The stark example of euthanasia for gender dysphoria in Belgium also discloses a deeper underlying truth. The desire for death by lethal injection gave "loneliness or isolation" as a reason. In Oregon, more than half of those seeking physician assisted suicide cited being a "burden on family, friends/caregivers". Legalising assisted dying adds to the feeling of being a burden but offers only a lethal solution. We need to oppose these dangerous laws. We need non-lethal solutions to people's healthcare needs and, most of all, we need to demonstrate we value people's lives by fully including them in society.

Prof David A Jones, Director of the Anscombe Bioethics Centre, Professor of Bioethics, St Mary's University, Twickenham, and guest writer for the Scottish Council on Human Bioethics



A lifeline for people affected by suicide



We offer compassionate, emotional and practical support as well as a space to talk, writes **Lara Van de Peer**

It is estimated that when someone dies by suicide, up to 135 people may be impacted. The Suicide Bereavement Support Service (SBSS) is a Scottish Government initiative set up to help people who have been bereaved by suicide, delivered in partnership with Change Mental Health and Penumbra Mental Health in two pilot areas: Highland and Argyll & Bute, and Ayrshire & Arran, respectively.

The project was set up to provide support to families and friends of people who had died by suicide. It offers compassionate, emotional support and a space to talk through the particular and complex feelings that can follow losing a loved one in this way.

Practical support is also offered, which can take the form of liaising with GPs, Police Scotland or social work departments, or even help with funeral arrangements, talking to the Procurator Fiscal or other practical details. Support is free and confidential and is delivered on a one-to-one basis, with phone, online, and face-to-face support all offered as needed.

Since it was set up, the team of comprehensively trained practitioners have worked with over 160 people, helping them to navigate their bereavement and the many unanswered questions that can be left following a suicide. The service provided is very much person-centred, and responsive to the fact that everyone's journey through grief is different and unique.

As such, support is available from the days immediately after a suicide, or further down the line at a time when people may feel more

ready to access it. There is no waiting list to receive support, meaning that people get help at the time they particularly need it, and uniquely, support is also available for as long as required, with some people staying with the service for a year or more.

So, as well as supporting those immediately affected by suicide, the SBS service has evolved to provide support to those who have been more widely exposed to suicide, for example, at school or university or at work. We can also support neighbours, emergency service staff or community members affected.

While support is only available in the areas of delivery, if a suicide occurred within these areas, but the bereaved family or friends live outwith them, then the service can still support them.

Feedback received from the people that the service supports have described it as a 'lifeline' and their support sessions as 'a place where they are listened to and allowed to talk openly and express their feelings without any fear of being judged'.

Another person shared: "The suicide of my child was devastating. The support I have been receiving from the Suicide Bereavement Service has been invaluable in enabling me to find the strength to rebuild my life and heart."

The initial two-year pilot came to an end on 31 March 2023, but a one-year extension has recently been granted by the Scottish Government, showing the importance placed on this service. Moving forward, as the Scottish Government starts to implement its new Suicide Prevention Strategy,



'Creating Hope Together', it's very much hoped that everyone across Scotland will be able to access the Suicide Bereavement Support Service in the near future.

Referrals for support can be made by the Police, Scottish Ambulance Service, GPs, social work and mental health teams, as well as third sector and community support groups. Alternatively, people can also self-refer by contacting the SBSS team

directly. If you would like to know more about suicide bereavement support or find out how it can support you, please call and leave your name and number on 0800 4714768, email us at suicidebereavement-support@nhs.scot or visit www.changemh.org/sbs.

Lara Van de Peer, Project Manager for the Suicide Bereavement Support Service at Change Mental Health

↑ The Suicide Bereavement Support team – from left, Sheila Houston, Annie Lawson, Lara Van de Peer and Annalie MacKenzie



We're here to help businesses access the finance they need to thrive

Sourcing insight and expertise is a crucial piece of the puzzle for firms, writes **Barry McCulloch**

As we head into a new tax year, many smaller businesses will be thinking about budgets for the next 12 months and how to continue building resilience during challenging times. External finance may already be part of this conversation among some business owners, but for others there remains a lack of awareness about the options available to them.

That was one of the key findings from our latest research looking at the views of the Scottish business advisory community. We spoke to a range of accountants, lawyers, business support specialists and brokers to get an overview of the key challenges and opportunities they are coming across through conversations with smaller businesses and entrepreneurs. Nearly two-thirds (65 per cent) pinpointed a

lack of awareness of finance options as the biggest barrier to demand. Furthermore, around another two-thirds said demand for finance exceeded supply (63 per cent). In practice, that means many smaller businesses in Scotland are likely to struggle to access the level of funding and investment needed to support their growth.

Against the backdrop of economic uncertainty, it is unsurprising to hear that many smaller firms have an anticipated need for additional finance in the year ahead. According to the people we surveyed, demand for finance was considered strong across all stages of development for Scottish small businesses, whether they are just starting up (81 per cent strong demand), looking to scale up (80 per cent), consolidating success (56 per cent) or navigating uncertainty (83 per cent).

Drivers of demand include an increase in new businesses post-pandemic and the desire to make improvements to reduce energy consumption. According to our 2022 SME Finance Survey, around four in ten (37 per cent) smaller businesses in Scotland were anticipating growth in the year ahead.

To help turn their ambitions into a reality, however, many smaller businesses are likely to require financial support. Two-thirds (65 per cent) of the business advisory community said that expansion was the most important driver for smaller businesses taking on additional finance.

On the other hand, our research also pointed towards a range of macroeconomic reasons which could potentially prevent small firms from realising their ambitions. Economic constraints and energy costs were highlighted as

the most prevalent issues with 83 per cent and 75 per cent respectively.

The Bank's aim is to encourage and support smaller businesses to access the right type of finance that is best suited to their needs, particularly for supporting goals such as growth. For any Scottish entrepreneurs and business owners looking for more information about the options available to them, we have created a free-to-use online Finance Hub and interactive Finance Finder to help try to close some of the



The peer-to-peer approach to problem solving can yield highly effective results

Sharing more good practice and innovations – and making useful connections – will help your organisation feel less alone, says **Joe Pacitti**



Clearly there are always challenges for every sector to face and the priority for how these impact on the business do flex and change. The need to attract and retain talent and challenges in the supply chain have both been constant themes for a while for manufacturing and engineering.

We have also seen the realignment of the new shift post-pandemic to different working patterns such as flexible working – strongly aligned to the talent challenge – and there may be specific concerns that manufacturing companies need to address.

Interestingly, the forward-looking companies see the opportunity to adopt different, more modern thinking in flexible working. CeeD has been working with Flexibility Works and Scottish Government to explore some of these issues and have found some exemplar cases. It is fair to say that it is not just large companies with greater bandwidth that have shown the way here – good practice is being drawn from a range of company types and sizes and so we do seem to be working towards some positive benefits from this approach.

The net zero challenge and how this is impacting on manufacturing and engineering has increased its pace. Remanufacturing as a way to manage resource constraints is frequently spoken about, and one element of this is around the challenges in meeting long and complex supply chain issues that businesses face.

One example is a high precision subcontractor providing a two-to-three-week turnaround on remanufacturing products compared to eight weeks or longer for an OEM supply of a replacement part. Even if the part cannot be remanufactured, the ability to reverse engineer from scratch can also hold a benefit in carbon saving and time.

The one hot challenge is the rising energy costs that face us all and in particular manufacturing and engineering businesses that rely on power and heat as part of their process. Government and the ener-

gy suppliers have their part to play in looking at ways to influence the energy costs for supply and we do see companies that help in improving the way business negotiate and contract their energy supply agreements. However, the fundamental here is really on energy security and the long-term policy change needed.

The bit that we also see however is the technology solutions we could draw upon using the likes of heat pumps, heat recovery from waste and even novel use of feedstock materials and how to trace these using technology software platforms. This works even to at least explore how it could work when you are part of a trusted open-sharing network where innovation is brought about through collaboration of technology, knowledge and sometimes simply signposting is generously given.

CeeD is such a network, so peer-to-peer exchange can often solve those simple problems. Information and 'show and tell' can help make that implementation step easier. It is also a good support on the journey to solving some of the more complex wicked problems – providing a route map on what might work and help guide others away from what might not!

Having just had our CeeD Awards 23 in early March, we have been able to see innovation in a wide range of disciplines that support manufacturing and engineering businesses. The winners' successes provide tangible evidence of companies, academics, and Government agencies with a desire to learn more from one another.

However, all of the applications help us to spot opportunities to share more good practice and innovations – and even the potential to make connections that might be useful for those organisations in partnership.

I'll always stress the importance, power and influence of the peer-to-peer approach and suggest that you look out for the variety of case studies on the CeeD website which covers the varied themes mentioned above to see if these can help your own organisation feel less alone.

Joe Pacitti, Managing Director, CeeD

