

## **Rapid Response:**

### **Healthcare professionals in the House of Lords join calls to bring the assisted dying bill back**

Dear Editor,

This letter was sent on 18 May to MPs by eight peers of the House of Lords with nursing and medical backgrounds, to show our support for the assisted dying bill and calling for the Commons to bring the bill back in the next parliamentary session. Healthcare professionals have a range of views on this legislation and many of us those that are in parliament regret that a small number of peers blocked a Bill that a majority of MPs supported.

Dear Member of Parliament,

We write as your colleagues in Parliament, and as clinicians, to ask that you continue to support urgent law reform on assisted dying.

Despite receiving a clear majority of support among MPs after extensive scrutiny, the Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) Bill was blocked by the House of Lords. Procedural obstruction by a handful of peers prevented us from voting on amendments before the clock ran out and the Bill fell. From our personal and professional perspectives, we were dismayed by this. The onus is now on you, as MPs, to ensure parliament is able to come to a decision on this matter.

This Bill draws on years of proven best practice from overseas. Legislators and medical professionals from around the world have shown us that establishing a legal framework for end-of-life choice is far preferable to the dangerous status quo. It is our view that failing to pass this legislation – and even denying peers an opportunity to vote on the Bill – has put many more dying people and their families at risk, and consequently damaged public trust in parliament.

Key elements of the Bill reflect existing best practice in decision-making, including at the end of life, and in assessing capacity, empowering informed consent, and safeguarding against coercion and undue influence. This is work that we in the healthcare professions carry out every single day; to suggest that we cannot be trusted to support people in making choices about their own lives is wrong. Too many amendments tabled by peers ignored these parallels and would have made the assisted dying process less safe and less clear for dying people and healthcare professionals.

Medical and nursing professionals increasingly support a change in the law. Every major medical organisation has dropped its opposition to assisted dying in favour of neutrality, enabling it to engage constructively in the debate.

The Bill underwent more than 100 hours of scrutiny in the Commons, with expert input from a range of medical stakeholders. We were pleased to see that key decisions and changes called for by the British Medical Association were made by the Commons, including conscience protections for doctors, a clear opt-in model and the rejection of a prohibition on

doctors using their professional judgment in discussing assisted dying with eligible adults. The BMA welcomed these decisions in its briefing to peers.

This is how we have been trusted to legislate. We believe it is our role to listen to the will of the people and our patients, consider expert evidence, and use the opportunity to lend our unique expertise and offer comprehensive and constructive scrutiny.

Despite our disappointment, it is clear that this debate must continue until parliament reaches a decision. It is now for the Commons to assert its primacy, to enable us to do our jobs effectively, and to regain the trust of the public.

Yours sincerely,

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Lord Naren Patel KT FMedSci FRSE  
Baroness Mary Watkins FRCN  
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Competing interests: CG is Patron, Humanist Society.

AI use: None declared.

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