

# ASSISTED DYING: SUPPORT THAT CANNOT BE IGNORED.

# CAMPAIGN FOR DIGNITY IN DYING.

JUNE 2015

**82%**  
OF THE GENERAL  
PUBLIC

**79%**  
OF RELIGIOUS  
PEOPLE

**86%**  
OF DISABLED  
PEOPLE

**SUPPORT THE  
CHOICE OF  
ASSISTED DYING  
FOR TERMINALLY  
ILL PEOPLE.**

Members of the public overwhelmingly support a change in the law on assisted dying. These results come from the largest poll ever conducted on this issue (5,000 people).<sup>1</sup>

An assisted dying law would provide choice at the end of life to terminally ill, mentally competent adults who have six months or less to live and who feel their suffering has become unbearable.

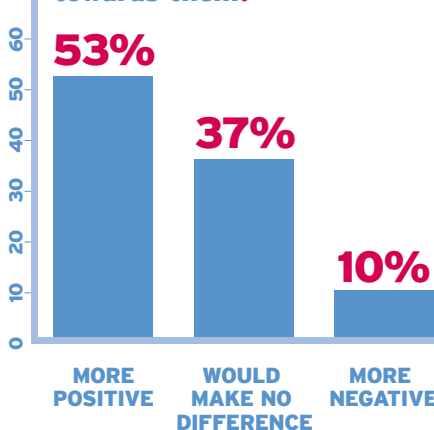
Two doctors would assess the dying patient independently to ensure they understood of all their care options, and that they met the law's eligibility criteria and safeguards. A High Court judge would have to be satisfied that the requesting person had made a voluntary, clear and settled decision to end their life.

The dying person would take the life-ending medication themselves; assisted dying is not euthanasia (where a doctor directly ends the life of a patient).

Support for a change in the law on assisted dying is consistently high regardless of age, social class or political preference.

## **POLITICIANS MUST ENGAGE WITH THIS DEBATE.**

**The public were asked:  
'if your MP were to vote  
in support of assisted  
dying, would you feel  
more positive or negative  
towards them?'**



When asked to consider MPs who support a change in the law the public use words such as **compassionate, caring, in-touch,** and **progressive**; while MPs who stand against it are more likely to be described as **lacking compassion, out of touch** and **backward-looking**.<sup>1</sup>

In the last Parliament, Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill progressed further than any previous legislation on this issue, before running out of time. Significantly, **Peers voted by 2 to 1 to support the Bill** when faced with amendments that would have

derailed it, a complete reversal of previous debates on assisted dying.

Both the public and the Courts demand that politicians seriously examine proposals on assisted dying. **79% of people think the House of Commons should give full consideration to assisted dying legislation and, in June 2014, the Supreme Court put Parliament on notice to address the problems in the current law.**<sup>1</sup>

Ignoring the suffering of dying people and the inadequacies of our current law is no longer an option.

## **THE CURRENT LAW IS FAILING.**

The current law forces dying people who want to control the manner and timing of their death to do so behind closed doors with no regulation and no safeguards; this does nothing to protect potentially vulnerable people and leads to many people dying alone in appalling circumstances. In approximately 7% of suicides in England the person ending their own life is terminally ill.<sup>2</sup>

Every two weeks somebody from the UK travels abroad to receive assistance to die. Because of the need to be well enough to travel, many people end their lives in this way much earlier than they would choose to if an assisted dying law were in place in this country. The lack of clarity in the current law also means that some people travel abroad to die alone, through fear of their loved ones being prosecuted for assisting them.

Critically, the current law no longer commands the respect of the British people, **44% of people would consider breaking the law to assist a loved one to die.**<sup>1</sup>

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## HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS.

The campaign group Healthcare Professionals for Assisted Dying (HPAD) has over 1,600 members made up of practising, retired and student healthcare professionals, all of whom support a change in the law on assisted dying.

# HPAD

Healthcare Professionals  
for Assisted Dying

**87%**  
**OF THE PUBLIC**  
**SAY THAT A**  
**CHANGE IN THE**  
**LAW ON ASSISTED**  
**DYING WOULD**  
**INCREASE OR**  
**HAVE NO EFFECT**  
**ON THEIR TRUST**  
**IN DOCTORS**  
**TO ALWAYS ACT**  
**IN THE BEST**  
**INTERESTS OF**  
**THEIR PATIENTS<sup>1</sup>**

It is incorrect to state that the majority of healthcare professionals oppose assisted dying. In fact, 54% of GPs support or are neutral to a change in the law (34% support and 20% are neutral).<sup>3</sup> Additionally, 58% of nurses support or are neutral to a change in the law.<sup>4</sup>

Concerns around doctors not being willing to participate in assisted dying are unfounded. The evidence indicates that only 49% of GPs would *not* be willing to be involved in any part of the process.<sup>3</sup>

The Assisted Dying Bill sets out a conscientious objection clause for healthcare professionals who would not want to be part of the process.

Per year, we expect around 9,000 patients would discuss the choice of assisted dying with their GP, of these around 1,900 would take their request further, meet the eligibility criteria and formally request the life-ending medication. Then around 1,200 people would take the prescribed life-ending medication and have an assisted death. There would be one assisted death per GP practice every eight to nine years.<sup>5</sup>

56% of GPs think that representative bodies such as the British Medical Association (BMA) should adopt a neutral position on assisted dying.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, a majority (55%) of Royal College of Physicians members do not agree with their College's current stance of opposition.<sup>6</sup> **The BMA has never conducted a full survey of its membership on assisted dying.**

Assisted dying has been legal in Oregon since 1997. The Oregon Hospice Association were initially opposed to assisted dying, but later acknowledged that: *There is no evidence that assisted dying has undermined Oregon's end-of-life care or harmed the interests of vulnerable people.*<sup>7</sup>

The public clearly want a change in the law and would feel positively towards MPs who support the



**54%**

**OF GPs ARE**  
**SUPPORTIVE OR**  
**NEUTRAL TO A**  
**CHANGE IN THE LAW**

Assisted Dying Bill. Many healthcare professionals also support the choice of assisted dying and half of GPs would be willing to participate in the process. Politicians now have a duty to engage with this debate.

**F**ormer Mayor of Brighton, Gill Sweeting, was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in December 2014.

**“** I feel I should be in control of my own death, and not be forced to suffer against my wishes. It's far more sensible to end your life in a controlled way than do it yourself which can go wrong and which is likely to be very messy, for instance if you throw yourself under a train it mucks up a lot of people's lives.

**“** I had always thought that by the time I needed assisted dying it would be legal, but it isn't. I have just voted in my last General Election and I hope that I have contributed towards a Parliament who will finally give the British public what they want – a compassionate assisted dying law. It is most likely too late for me, but I hope that others in the future will be given the comfort of knowing they can choose the manner and timing of their death. I just wish that I could have had that choice as well.**”**



<sup>1</sup> Populus (March, 2015)

<sup>2</sup> FOI request (October, 2014) [www.dignityindying.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/FOI\\_report\\_A\\_Hidden\\_Problem.pdf](http://www.dignityindying.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/FOI_report_A_Hidden_Problem.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> medeConnect (May, 2015)

<sup>4</sup> Royal College of Nursing consultation (July, 2009)

<sup>5</sup> These estimated figures apply to England and Wales and have been calculated based on research from Oregon (Tolle et al, 2004), the Oregon Death with Dignity Act Annual Report (2014) and mortality data from the ONS (2013).

<sup>6</sup> Royal College of Physicians consultation (November, 2014)

<sup>7</sup> Jackson A/Oregon Hospice Association (2006) The reality of assisted dying in Oregon, APPG on Compassion in Dying, House of Lords, 2006

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