

Sufferer's cry: 'I am so sorry I have had to end my life this way'



Multiple sclerosis sufferer Lawrie Daniel and his wife Rebecca before his death last month.

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In the quiet hours while Lawrie Daniel waited for death, he wrote heartbreaking letters to his wife Rebecca and to the NSW Coroner describing his unrelenting pain from multiple sclerosis, calling for voluntary euthanasia to be legalised to ensure people would not have to die alone.

"I am so sorry I have had to leave you all and end my life this way, but I could see no other option available to me in the circumstances," Daniel wrote.

"I ask for everyone's compassionate understanding, and I ask you all to please forgive me. You and our children helped me every day during nearly a decade of my life with this illness, with infinite loving kindness. Thank you for everything."

Daniel, 51, took his life at their home west of the Blue Mountains on September 24, while his wife and two children were on respite.

Ms Daniel has shared his story with *The Australian*, as discussions over the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia intensify. Liberal Duncan McFetridge will introduce a bill to the

South Australian parliament today. “He didn’t want to go, he didn’t want to die, but I know that he fully supported the right of people to say ‘I’ve had enough,’” Ms Daniel said.

The father of two children aged 13 and 15 was diagnosed with MS on his 44th birthday but had been suffering symptoms for two years previously. He was wheelchair-bound and in his letter wrote of his deteriorating hands. His breathing would also stop up to 30 times a night. He wrote of constant pain associated with paralysis, incontinence, physical deformities, his feet and legs “feeling like they are burning with cold fire”, musculoskeletal and neuropathic discomfort, weakness in his hands, fingers and thumbs, tremors and spasms, and “mind-and-body exhaustion”.

“I am dealing with all of this at once, and it is unrelenting,” Daniel wrote to his wife. “You and I have done everything we could possibly think of for so long now to slow or reverse this process, and I am losing the battle.”

Debate has centred this week on amendments to the South Australian bill to ensure disability, age and mental health are excluded as grounds for eligibility and only the terminally ill with untreatable “intolerable” suffering gain access to the proposed law. TV personality and euthanasia advocate Andrew Denton, who watched his father Kit’s agonising death, said failure for the law to pass after 14 attempts in the state would be a “great denial of the public’s will”.

“More than that, what will continue in our society are elderly suicides because of incurable illnesses and horrible testimonies from families of loved ones who are dying needlessly painful deaths,” he said this week.

Adelaide lawyer Stephen Kenny, who ran for state parliament in 2014 on a Legal - Voluntary Euthanasia Group ticket, did not think “terminal illness” was an essential term because it excluded people suffering non-life-threatening illnesses. “The important thing is for people to be able to access assisted dying at an unbearable time in their life while they’re suffering a debilitating illness,” he said. “The idea is to stop them starving themselves to death or committing suicide.”

Ms Daniel regretted not being with her husband but knew he was suffering what doctors described as “dying in slow motion”.

They had discussed voluntary euthanasia and Daniel had made a submission to the Victorian inquiry into end-of-life choices. In his letter to the coroner he asked that his death be recorded as heart failure or complications from MS, and not suicide.