

# Labor councillor's plea to NSW MPs: 'Don't rob my dad of choice'



By Sean Nicholls

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Forty years ago Gary Scott sat by his father's hospital bed in the small Victorian country town of St Arnaud and watched helplessly as he died slowly of bowel cancer.

Over an agonising period, Dr Scott's father, Herb, struggled against the pain with liberal doses of morphine but without food, the consequence of a side effect of his cancer which meant he was unable to eat.

"It was a small room ... subdued lighting," the 77-year-old recalls, tears welling in his eyes despite the decades that have passed.

"When Dad was lucid he would say, 'Please do something'. He was losing his dignity. He was losing his confidence. His fighting spirit had been broken. And he lasted six months like that."



Linda Scott with her father Gary, who has been diagnosed with stomach cancer. Photo: Daniel Munoz

The terrible experience consolidated Dr Scott's belief that no one – patient or family – should have to go through a similar ordeal.

It is a belief that has returned to confront him and his daughter, City of Sydney Labor councillor Linda Scott, following his own diagnosis last August with stomach cancer, later found to have metastasised to his bones.

Dr Scott, who holds a PhD in chemistry and lives in an nursing home on Sydney's northern beaches, is involved in a chemotherapy trial which has halted the growth of his tumours but knows his condition is terminal and that he faces a potentially agonising death.

He and his Ms Scott are urging MPs to vote in favour of a voluntary assisted dying bill due to come before the upper house of the NSW Parliament within months.

The bill, drafted by a cross party working group, would legalise voluntary assisted dying from the age of 25 for those likely to die from a terminal illness within 12 months and experiencing extreme pain, suffering or physical incapacity.

Among the safeguards in the bill are that a patient needs to consult two doctors, have a psychiatrist or psychologist attest to their mental capacity, and would retain the right to rescind the request at any time.

However, high profile opponents include the Australian Medical Association and the leader of Ms Scott's own party in the NSW Parliament, Luke Foley, who says he will vote against the bill should it make it to the lower house.

MPs from all major parties will be granted a conscience vote.

For Dr Scott the bill represents the chance to ensure that the law can be changed "so that we don't have these appalling situations".

For Ms Scott, it is perhaps the only chance to deliver her father the option of assisted dying, should he eventually choose that path.

"I want him to live for as long as he possible can," she said.

"I hope that Dad never has to choose. But I don't want him robbed of the option about a choice between his life and his death because of a bill not being passed in Parliament."

Ms Scott said she understands the issue is deeply personal for many people and "I respect that."

But she worries that should the bill be defeated it would rob Dr Scott of the choice as the issue is unlikely to return for some time.

"People should vote to give my dad a choice about his own life and his own death," she said.

"They can choose for themselves what they want to do with their own bodies. But they shouldn't rob my dad of a choice about his own life."

Dr Scott's message to MPs is simple: "For goodness sake, make [the bill] as tight as everyone wants it to be [with safeguards], but get on with doing it".

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