

VOLUNTARY ASSISTED DYING BILL 2021

Legislative Assembly Second Reading Debate – copied from Hansard 19 November 2021

Mrs MELINDA PAVEY (Oxley—Minister for Water, Property and Housing) (16:25): Via video link: I sat very moved as I listened to speeches and contributions from all sides of the debate on the Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill 2021. I think on the whole there is more that unites us than divides us. When I look at the principles of the bill, every human life has equal value. A person's autonomy, including [inaudible] should be respected. A person has the right to be supported in making informed decisions about their medical treatment and should be given in a way the person understands information about the medical treatment options, including [inaudible] and palliative care treatment. A person approaching the end of life should be provided with high-quality care and treatment, including palliative care. A therapeutic relationship between a person and the person's health practitioner should, wherever possible, be supported and maintained. A person should be encouraged [inaudible] death and dying preferences and values regarding the person's care and treatment [inaudible]. The person should be supported in conversations with the person's health practitioners, family and carers [inaudible] treatment preferences. A person is entitled to choices about the person's care, treatment and [inaudible] irrespective of where a person lives in New South Wales and having regard to the person's culture and language.

This is where I have a challenge with the bill, a challenge with the concept of euthanasia. As a country-based MP and former Parliamentary Secretary for Regional and Rural Health, I know there are stresses around care and about treatment that is not available to all fairly and equitably. As I said in my contribution in the other Chamber many years ago, my view is that palliative care is the secret to this [inaudible] our great palliative practitioners, and I acknowledge the contribution just now from the member for Maitland. I know that they have a great palliative care team there. We have great teams up here on the Mid North Coast, but my concern is if we accept [inaudible] we are accepting a substandard health system that is not [inaudible] and that is dying with dignity and at peace. Dying is not easy. It is the most harrowing thing a family can go through. But if you have a plan, if you have an advanced medical directive, if you have a good relationship with your legal profession and a patient advocate, all of those things [inaudible] to strive to achieve it that way.

I have looked at the statistics in relation to Victoria since it introduced its legislation. Last year 224 people accessed their provisions to die at the moment of their choosing. That is about [inaudible] per cent or 50,000 or so Victorians who die annually. But my concern was that [inaudible] per cent of those people lived outside metropolitan Melbourne. It goes to my point that that is an overrepresentation of country people who are not getting the care they should and that they deserve. I know that this will go [inaudible] support that is very firm within my community and I very sadly acknowledge Jenny Sproule, who was a very good leader in this community and who was at the [inaudible] to support this bill.

I acknowledge the conversation I had today with Paul Norris, who recently lost his beautiful young wife, Karen, who was also a nurse. We had quite an emotional conversation today. While he wants me to support the bill, he can understand my fear around care. The big conversation our community needs to have is what we need to do to fix palliative care. I have said it before and I will say it again: I call on the Australian Medical Association and the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons to appreciate and understand their lack of coverage of specialties in regional New South Wales, in particular, and to do more for our nation, which has one of the highest rates of doctors per capita. Those doctors are not fairly distributed. In a lot of conversations I have had with people who want to give others the chance to die without pain, they say that the issue could be addressed by better and more timely access to medical care at the time of passing.

I have spoken to others in my community whose family members and loved ones never had the opportunity to have a passing that was pain free. Dying will never be [inaudible]. I do not think you can choose your moment of passing. People have said, "We have gone to be with mum and dad, but it has taken them so long." Sometimes that is [inaudible], it is so huge, but it cannot be timed to a perfect point. These debates do not give us the opportunity to talk genuinely about the many topics that we must discuss as a society. A much higher proportion of the sick and elderly are now living longer. We must have conversations about the medical issues that confront us. I am particularly troubled by the provision in the bill that relates to a medical specialist

or a GP agreeing to a request for euthanasia and assessing the patient's right to choose their moment of passing. I believe that requires specialist conversations.

I am also troubled [inaudible]. I have seen community members go to a doctor who was giving vaccinations very freely. Whilst having read [inaudible] the strong provisions around that, part of my concern is that no two people are the same and the right advice may not be given to patients and their families. I acknowledge the contribution from the Premier and I appreciate his honesty and integrity to suggest that he may have failed. I think we have all failed. I think the medical profession has failed. We need more gerontologists and palliative care specialists. I acknowledge the work and what I have learnt over many years from [inaudible] a former medical specialist. It is those type of people, along with nurse practitioners and palliative care nurses, who should be able to give people those [inaudible]. I thank everybody for their contributions and their stories, their heart and their soul as we have this free vote. Although I always vote with my conscience, we are free of our party affiliations to vote how we wish on this bill. I acknowledge the people who made contributions. I also thank those who reached out to me for understanding where I am coming from and for acknowledging what we need to do [inaudible] within regional New South Wales.