

MY DEATH MY DECISION

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Patron: Dr Michael Irwin

PRESS RELEASE: MDMD Response to Noel Conway's legal challenge on Assisted Dying

My Death, My Decision is pleased that, with support from Dignity in Dying, (DiD), Noel Conway, who is most unfortunately terminally ill with motor neurone disease, has begun judicial review proceedings, claiming that the failure of Parliament to amend the present Suicide Act, to permit him to have a medically-assisted rational suicide, unlawfully interferes with his rights.

While welcoming Mr Conway's appeal, MDMD regards his attempt to change the law only as a "first step". By focusing on someone who is terminally ill, we are forgetting that very many other individuals (especially the elderly) may also be suffering severely, and for much longer periods than six months, from various medical conditions. These people may also hope, for the possibility of a legalized medically-assisted rational suicide. Whenever our Parliament considers legalizing "assisted dying" again, it must then consider changing the law to include all competent, incurably suffering adults - as is fortunately possible today in Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and Switzerland.

The six-month criterion proposed by DiD is a particular problem for those suffering from early stage dementia. By the time a sufferer is within six months of dying they will have lost their mental capacity to choose an assisted death, should that be available. By then they are likely to have experienced extensive suffering and loss of dignity. Dementia is now the single largest cause of death in England and Wales. [Office of National Statistics: Deaths registered in England and Wales (Series DR): 2015]

MDMD also wants to comment on part of the extensive statement by Mr. Conway which appears on the DiD website, www.dignityindying.org.uk/news/noel-conway-seeks-change-law. In this, he notes that, regarding the possibility of going to DIGNITAS in Switzerland, "I do not wish to die in a faceless clinic, away from home and without my loved ones around me". Since MDMD was founded in 2009, at least nine of its supporters have travelled to Switzerland to end their lives there. Most of them have gone to DIGNITAS. Our patron, Dr. Michael Irwin, has personally witnessed five such assisted suicides. While we strongly agree with the need for assisted dying without travelling abroad, it is a great distortion of the truth to describe DIGNITAS – To live with dignity – To die with dignity, near Zurich, as "faceless". In fact, The Guardian, on November 18, 2009, noted that it "is sunny, clean and neutral, not unlike a holiday rental apartment". Furthermore, everyone can see photos on the DIGNITAS-website. The word "clinic" is inappropriate as there is no medical staff or equipment present (although an individual is interviewed by a Swiss physician, independent of DIGNITAS, upon their arrival in Zurich, who writes the necessary prescription). Furthermore, family members and friends are encouraged by DIGNITAS to be present when someone dies, and this happens with almost all assisted dying cases.

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My Death, My Decision campaigns for the option of a medically assisted death to be available to those who, due to incurable medical conditions, find that their quality of life is permanently below the level they are able to accept, provided this is their own well considered and persistent wish. MDMD, (formerly SOARS: the Society for Old Age Rational Suicide), was formed in 2009 after the Voluntary Euthanasia Society changed its name to Dignity in Dying and chose to limit its campaign to those who have six months or less to live.