

During my working life, first as a general nurse and then working in palliative care, I often met people who felt that their life was complete and that they were no longer prepared to fight to stay alive. I also found that people did not tell their family this, in case they were thought to have "given up".

These were people who had a serious and life threatening disease. I often felt that they were being urged to "keep fighting" when in fact they were quite ready to give up. And when, later, families said what a good fight they put up, my instinct was that the patient was fighting to be allowed to let go peacefully.

As a nurse, working within the laws of this country, it was not possible to give any advice. On very few occasions I did warn someone about the dangers of overdosing their medication. I tried to do this in such a way that, should they wish to commit suicide, they would be more likely to succeed.

For years palliative care physicians and oncology specialists have promoted the belief that we must "fight" cancer. The weapons they offer are medication and treatment to alleviate the physical symptoms, which can be very successful for many people. The emotional pain is harder to treat. A strong religious belief certainly helps and the particular brand of religion makes little difference. For people who do not accept the idea of a personal god to ease them through life, and whatever follows life, some other answer is required.

I have no belief in any of the gods. I have always suspected that an ideal shelf life for many people is about seventy years. So often, people say that until the age of seventy they always felt very well indeed. After seventy their health began to deteriorate. Obviously there are wonderful men and women who are busy and active and enjoying life well beyond eighty or ninety years of age. They are the fortunate ones and are fewer in number.

Until I was seventy I was very fit and able to fully participate in any activity I wanted to do. I felt I could still be busy and useful and fairly productive. Then I had a severe attack of Shingles and it all changed.

At seventy five I am told I look ok and I take no medication. But I am aware of a steady decline in my energy and enthusiasm for life. In fact I feel my life is complete and I am ready to die. My family are well and happy –their lives are full and busy. I can no longer walk the distances I used to enjoy so the happy hours spent exploring the streets of London are just a memory now.

I cannot do the garden with the enthusiasm I once had and I find fifteen minutes is more than enough time spent weeding or digging. Even that short time can result in a day on the sofa or a visit to the osteopath.

My tinnitus is a big distraction. My hearing loss is helped by using hearing aids, but the tinnitus appears to enjoy competition, and seems to increase in volume, to meet the increased external noise, so I find it impossible to talk in a group of more than four people, and often have to activate the subtitles on the TV. I do not enjoy the carnivals like Notting Hill or Gay Pride which I once so loved.

I do not have any desire to travel any more –there is nowhere I want to visit enough to spend hours in an aeroplane or airport.

I have always loved cooking but I find it an effort now and prefer to have a couple of friends for lunch rather than a large late dinner party. Not to mention the hundred and one other minor irritations like being unable to stand for long, carry a heavy shopping bag, run for a bus, remember the names of books I have read, or am reading, or their authors.

And I have a number of aches and pains which restrict my pleasure in life generally although none are totally incapacitating.

Yes, of course, I am very fortunate that all of these irritations are comparatively trivial. And no, I am not just whinging. Neither am I depressed. Day by day I am

enjoying my life. I simply do not want to follow this natural deterioration through to the last stage when I may be requiring a lot of help. I have to take action early on because no one else will be able to take action for me. The thought that I may need help from my children totally appalls me. I know many old people expect, and even demand, help from their children but I think this is a most selfish and unreasonable view. I had children for the personal and selfish reason that I wanted them for the pleasure and joy they bring. I tried to be a good mother because I owed them a happy childhood. I wish I had made a better job of that but I did my best. I want them to enjoy their middle years without having to worry about me.

I do not feel they have any responsibility for me in my old age. In fact I very strongly do not want them to feel any responsibility for me at all. I see so many of my contemporaries who have restricted lives because of even older relatives, who live far too long, and who themselves have a poor quality of life.

Nor would I want a professional carer if it were possible to have one. I have worked with carers, supported and helped to train carers, and even written a book for carers. I have a great admiration for them. They are frequently abused, poorly paid, poorly trained, with no prospects of developing a career, and often that is the only work they can do, and not the job they would have chosen if they were able to choose. Many family members do not feel they can care for their older relatives, and I have every sympathy for them, but we expect poorly paid carers to do the work, and do it well, and find it rewarding. As many do.

So, my options are limited. I have had to make my exit while I am in my right mind and capable of doing so without too much assistance, because I am afraid of compromising the people around me whom I love. I have had to do this outside my home, and without telling too many people for the same reason. I have written my goodbyes and tidied my life and hope I have managed to exit as unobtrusively as possible. I have always held a donor card but that will be redundant now.

If I could have booked my death quite openly I could have had a party before I died, in the way that people have done, and continue to do in Switzerland, and other places. In which case, perhaps any of my body parts that could be reused could be

collected immediately. I could also be sure that I will never be an old lady blocking beds in a hospital ward. This would save the NHS a fortune.

I have had a tremendously lucky life. I have been so lucky with my children: with Caron, who has made me a 'grandmother' to two kittens, and who has shared so many of her friends with me, despite the distance between us. And Mark, who brought me an Australian daughter in law and a part Australian grandson, who have all been a source of joy although so far away. My family seem to have forgiven my many mistakes, and always loved me and encouraged me as I finally found my way back to my chosen career in my thirties.

I have made some wonderful friends, up to the very last week I have been meeting people, who I already count as friends.

I chose work that filled my life, enabled me to pay my way and was immensely rewarding, and again, led me to meet some truly marvelous and exceptional people, and hopefully be of help to them, when help was needed.

And when I had long decided I was destined to be on my own, I met John. He has been the love of my life, a tremendous support, right to the very end, and also an absolutely infuriating companion, and he has made me laugh as I never laughed before.

Now I want people to remember me as I am now –a bit worn around the edges and not quite at my peak, but still recognizably me !.

I hope that people will support, without judgment, my family and my friends, not all of whom know my plans. I know people will have different reactions to my choice but I would like to think that anyone who has ever cared for me will be happy for me, that I have avoided the kind of old age I have always dreaded and feared.

I do not promote this action for anyone who does not want it. I do not want the right to euthanize the mentally ill or physically handicapped. I ask that the Lawmakers should listen to, and respect, the views of people like me, and I am not alone in

holding this view. We are being ignored by the law, which originates from a god in whom we have no belief, and which is upheld and enforced by people who have no proof of the existence of any god at all and yet still seek to impose their views on everyone else.

Morally, ethically and financially this country, and the people who live here, would benefit from the government re-thinking the whole subject.