

## Assisted Dying - No change in the Law

Written by PAG

Wednesday, 04 February 2015 22:07

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Rushen MHK, Juan Watterson, was emphatically refused by his Keys colleagues (03.02.15) that:

"Leave be granted to introduce a Bill to amend the Law with respect to assisted dying and for connected purposes."

It is a major rejection in a protracted campaign going back over a decade to get the law changed. In 2003 over 3000 people signed a postcard petition to say that they supported Voluntary Euthanasia. This was followed by an in-depth Select Committee Report which was largely ignored by parliament. In September 2010, Jo Cartwright, then Campaigns & Press Officer of UK Charity Dignity in Dying, addressed a packed public meeting organised by the Positive Action Group. This was later followed up with a visit to the Island by Sarah Wootton, Chief Executive of Dignity in Dying, who had meetings with interested groups.

Every 5th July the Isle of Man Parliament convenes outdoors at Tynwald Hill. It is a ceremonial and festive occasion and a national holiday. One of the ancient rights is that any person may present a Petition for Redress of Grievance for Tynwald to later consider. The matter may be chosen and even addressed, which can lead directly to the enactment of legislation. This year Millie Blenkinsop-French presented this heart felt petition:

*I call upon Tynwald to introduce Legislation with the intension to legalise  
"Assisted Suicide"*

*For people who have a Terminal Illness, and no Quality of life.*

*There comes a time in life when "Enough is Enough"*

*This is the 21stCentury- Human Beings should not have to die in Agony, Frustration, or Mental Despair.*

*Let us be the "First" and pave the way to rectify this deplorable situation. I am not afraid to die — I am afraid of "How I die"*

*Wherefore your petitionee prays that:*

*Tynwald set up a Select Committee of three Members who are authorised to take written and oral evidence pursuant to sections 3 & 4 of the Tynwald proceedings set 1876, as amended to consider and report to Tynwald on the law relating to "Assisted Dying"* It is a matter of choice for any Tynwald Member to 'pick up' the petition in order to request the establishment of a parliamentary Select Committee to investigate.

It appears that Juan Watterson MHK in fact responded to the petition by writing to his parliamentary colleagues in September signifying his intention of going direct to the House of Keys to seek to bring in legislation.

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This move was also influenced by the outcome of an inquest into the death of Peel woman, Cathy Pridham. The 60 year old walked into the sea, off Niarbyl, last March. Her tragic death has re-ignited the case for Assisted Dying laws to be introduced. She left a note stating "I wouldn't be doing this if there was assisted suicide in Britain"

During the February debate it became clear that colleagues were not convinced that there was enough time to get any legislation through during this administration.

It therefore remains to be seen if this topic will become a 2016 General Election issue and subsequently whether one courageous MHK will again bring it before Keys.