



CoEJ & MUS Letter to the **Secretary of State for Health and Members of Parliament** voicing our concerns regarding the UK Assisted Dying Bill



To

The Rt Hon Wes Streeting MP
Secretary of State for Health



Cc: Ruth Maskell MP
Chair of Dying Well APPG

Dear Mr Streeting,

We are writing to you to express our deep concern regarding the upcoming Private Members Bill on Assisted Dying on Friday 29th November 2024. As Islamic-faith based organisations, our core belief is that life is sacred, and both life & death are determined by God & God alone. We believe in compassionate care, empathy and comfort for patients who are terminally ill and dying. We firmly believe that all human beings should assist physically, psychologically, socially & spiritually when patients are dying. As such we resoundingly object to the term “Assisted Dying” as in actual fact the Bill is to assist in the termination of life, which we as a community can neither support nor accept.

We are concerned for the welfare of all patients who would fall into the ‘eligibility criteria’ for Assisted Dying. There is ample evidence that doctors are not 100% accurate in prognosticating the last 6 months (or any months) of life. This being the case, how can we consider terminating a life when the possibility exists for a person to live beyond the 6 month period? Would a patient consider terminating their life if there was the possibility of surviving longer than 6 months? Furthermore, the safeguards of mental capacity, assessments by two doctors and the short periods of reflection are by no means fool proof. Mental capacity can & does fluctuate, and the assessment of capacity can take time.

In the experience of many healthcare professionals, patients in the last 6 months of life are at their most vulnerable. Patients are acutely aware of the impact of their frailty, poor health and dependency on their carers, loved ones and health services. It is not implausible that many may feel under significant pressure to end their lives sooner to relieve the perceived demand & burden on those around them. The law would not be able to prevent coercion, nor prove beyond reasonable doubt that coercion took place, hence the implications of the Assisted Dying Bill are grave.

Indeed, doctors who look after dying patients are in active opposition to this proposed bill. An overwhelming 85-90% of the Members of the Association for Palliative Medicine reject this idea, as they believe adoption of such a Bill would lead to a sharp decline in good quality palliative care.

We also wish to express concern about the inequality faced by ethnic minorities and people with disabilities across all aspects of healthcare and the serious implications of this if the Assisted Dying Bill were to be passed into legislature.

The NHS and Palliative care services have been significantly underfunded and under-resourced over the past 15 years, and pressures on healthcare services are immense. The Assisted Dying bill, in our view, has been tabled at a time where the NHS does not have the capacity to provide the best in palliative care. Assisted Dying will be seen as an ‘option’ for many due to the lack of good quality palliative care. We strongly believe that well-resourced & easily accessible palliative care can offer the opportunity for the vast majority of patients to die comfortably, with empathy and in a dignified manner.

We sincerely hope that the Assisted Dying Bill is not voted through Parliament, for this sends a message that those with a few months left to live are less valuable than others, and society should never accept this premise. We must also acknowledge, as does the literature, that patients and their carers can experience significant growth & personal development in their relationships through supporting each other through terminal illness.

We sincerely hope that going forward all efforts are placed in ensuring NHS palliative care services are well-resourced to provide the high quality palliative care that the UK population rightly deserves to avoid the need for patients to consider ending their lives prematurely, lives that are all equally valuable & sanctified.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Arifali Hirji'.

Arifali Hirji
President, The Council of European Ulama

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Syed Ali Raza Rizvi'.

Syed Ali Raza Rizvi
Vice President, Majlis-e-Ulama-e-Shia Europe



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