

Tribunals needed for assisted suicide in the UK

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Credit: Melodi2 via www.sxc.hu

A new tribunal-style system to provide sympathetic and speedy consideration for each and every terminally-ill patient who wishes to end their lives is needed according to Claudia Carr, from the University of Hertfordshire's School of Law. The proposed system is being presented in a paper at the 1st Global Conference on Suicide, Self-Harm and

Assisted Dying being held in Athens this week.

The ethical and legal debates around assisted dying or assisted [suicide](#), where an individual helps another person with the means to end his or her own life, remain in the media's spotlight. However, the introduction of a new tribunal style system will provide the opportunity for each case to be assessed on its merits, and giving each patient the dignity to die when they choose.

Free will and autonomy

Claudia Carr, Senior Lecturer in Law at the University of Hertfordshire, said: "Assisted dying should not be prohibitive. Throughout a person's life, they have free will and autonomy to decide how to live their life. However, a person diagnosed with a terminal and [incurable disease](#) cannot decide to end their life at the time of their choosing and die with dignity – the law prohibits this and those that assist.

"The underlying fear of the slippery slope and the effect that legalising assisted suicide would have on the elderly and vulnerable is a justifiable one; however, the terminally-ill patient's autonomy should also be respected. It is right to protect the vulnerable and the disabled who could be influenced or pressurised to end their life for fear of being a burden on others. But it is oppressive to force those who wish to die, to remain living in pain and suffering."

Specialised tribunal panel

The introduction of a specialised tribunal panel, comprising representatives from both the judiciary and the medical profession, can assess each case on its merits.

The proposed system would seek to confirm whether the patient has a terminal condition from which they will die within 9-12 months, and each patient will be given a cooling off period to explore options of palliative care. Each case will be recorded and each death reported. The panel will ensure that the patient is not being unduly pressurised and the person who will assist has nothing to gain. Each case will be closely monitored and each patient's dignity to die as they choose will be respected.

Legalising assisted suicide whilst protecting the vulnerable

Carr concluded: "A new tribunal style system could respect a terminally-ill person's decision as to the stage at which they wish to end their life and in the place of their choice – which is more than likely to be at home surrounded by their family and friends.

"Now is the time for the UK Government to take the brave and audacious move to consider legalising [assisted suicide](#) in the UK whilst protecting the vulnerable."

Provided by University of Hertfordshire

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