



# End-of-Life Choice

VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA SOCIETY NEW ZEALAND INC

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## Statement by the Voluntary Euthanasia Society NZ June 2015

### **WOULD THE ELDERLY BE VULNERABLE IF PHYSICIAN ASSISTED DYING WAS LEGALISED IN NZ?**

Opponents of Physician Assisted Dying (PAD) are extremely vocal in saying that the elderly would be very vulnerable if legalisation occurred. They point to the elder abuse that is not that uncommon in our NZ population. The Voluntary Euthanasia Society NZ say that there is no evidence for elder abuse associated with PAD, and it is virtually impossible.

1. Elder abuse is clandestine at the moment and is usually only dealt with when it emerges before professional health personnel and bodies such as Age Concern.
  
2. The safeguards intended under the Maryan Street EOLC Bill include
  - a) they have to meet the criteria of a terminal disease and/or irreversible unbearable condition
  - b) they have to be mentally competent
  - c) they have to ask for PAD in writing twice with a separation period of 7 days
  - d) two doctors are involved in looking at the criteria and looking for coercion etc
  - e) each decision is reviewed by an expert committee

f) the process is reviewed by parliament annually

**These criteria and the formal, above the radar, process makes it virtually impossible for family and others to use PAD as part of an abusive pattern. The Supreme Court of Canada (Feb 2015) agrees with this assertion and says that medical practitioners are capable of discerning abuse and coercion.**

3. the elderly may sometimes feel a burden to others or feel that they are lonely or have had enough of life. This is a legitimate feeling and is common. However PAD is not possible for them unless they meet the strict criteria as above. Just because they feel that way does not mean they qualify for PAD

4. The experience in legalised jurisdictions has not shown any elder abuse associated with PAD – in fact the only study done on various vulnerable groups has confirmed lack of abuse. The onus is on bodies such as Care Alliance to show evidence for their claims.

Dr Jack Havill

on behalf of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society NZ (End-of-Life Choice)