

Medical assistance in dying: a response

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I read with interest the 26 June article by Winnington and McLeod regarding medical assistance in dying, MAID, in relation to the proposed legislation in New Zealand.¹ This was based on a single telephone interview with an in-law of a person who had assistance in dying overseas, together with a Youtube post from a 14-year-old Chilean girl. I will pass over the statistical and methodological aspects of this study, but the authors' comments should perhaps be challenged.

Firstly, there is an implication that wide consultation with family members is required in such cases, to avoid family upset. Lack of such discussion is referred to as secrecy, rather than confidentiality. I suspect that relatives are far more likely to be distressed by witnessing a slow, painful death than by any lack of prior consultations regarding MAID. The proposed law mandates discussion with health professionals and recommends it for family, and I would expect such encounters to be confidential.

Secondly, the 'slippery slope' hypothesis is used to imply that exposure to the idea of MAID will encourage people to use it—yet likely participants are expected to discuss their intentions more widely as mentioned above. Should this novel idea of withholding information be extended to other services (elective surgery, oncology, benefits, etc) lest they be used more frequently? Significant amendments to the proposed legislation would be required for any 'slippery slope' to occur in the future.

Many deaths are peaceful and comforting, some even inspiring, but the reference in the article to 'the majesty of death' in the context of assisted dying is quite frankly macabre, since the modes of deaths without MAID, given the proposed restrictions in the law, are likely to be far from majestic. The assertion that the process of death is nowadays taboo is clearly contradicted, not only by the presence of the article itself, but by all the discussion of the proposed law in the media and in meetings around the country.

Competing interests:

Nil.

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www.nzma.org.nz/journal-articles/medical-assistance-in-dying-a-response

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1. Winnington R, MacLeod R. Social consequences of assisted dying: a case study. *N Z Med J.* 2020; 133(1517):18–23.