

The Association for Palliative Medicine of Great Britain and Ireland

76 Botley Road, Park Gate, Southampton SO31 1BA

Telephone: 01489 565665 **Email:** becki.munro@apmonline.org **Web:** www.apmonline.org



11th July 2014

LORD FALCONER'S ASSISTED DYING BILL

We write as doctors who specialise in palliative care, the branch of medicine that treats patients who have incurable illnesses and are nearing the end of their lives. We write because of our serious concerns over Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill, which would license doctors to supply lethal drugs to terminally ill patients who request them and who meet certain criteria.

We care for dying people day in and day out and we fear that many of them could come to harm if this bill were to be enacted. There are some who fit the stereotype of the no-nonsense and strong-willed patient who is resolved to end his or her life. But there are many more who are not like this. Some are struggling to come to terms with their mortality, others suffer depression and changes of mood or feel guilt at the burden their illness may be placing on others. And there are yet others who do not have access to a level of social care to enable them to feel their lives are worth living. And, while most families of terminally ill people are loving and caring, sadly we do from time to time come across instances where that is not the case.

It is hard to think of a group of people more vulnerable than those who are dying. Yet Lord Falconer's Bill contains no safeguards to protect them. It does no more than state who is to be eligible for physician-assisted suicide. It kicks into the long grass the crucial question of how the process is to be regulated and how abuse is to be prevented.

While we fully respect the sincerity of those who believe the law should be changed, Lord Falconer's Bill comes nowhere near meeting the level of patient protection needed for such a fundamental change in the law. The concerns we express are shared by the overwhelming majority of physicians who specialise in treating terminal illness.

Yours sincerely

Dr David Brooks (President), Professor Robert George (Vice-President), Dr Jane Bentley, Dr Sharon Chadwick, Dr Alison Coackley, Dr Sarah Cox, Dr Jane Cowap, Dr Christopher Farnham, Dr Fiona Finlay, Dr Craig Gannon, Dr Aoife Gleeson, Dr Stephanie Gomm, Dr Eleanor Grogan, Dr Timothy Harlow, Professor Irene Higginson, Dr Andrew Hughes, Dr Iain Lawrie, Dr Rosemary Lennard, Dr Fiona Maccormick, Dr Kathryn Mannix, Dr Wendy Makin, Professor Matthew Makin, Dr Jon Martin, Dr Martine Meyer, Dr Fliss Murtagh, Dr Kathryn Myers, Dr Paul McNamara, Dr Tom Middlemiss, Dr Sally Middleton, Dr Alex Nicholson, Professor Tony O'Brien, Professor Scott Murray, Dr David Oliver, Dr Claud Regnard, Dr Julia Riley, Dr Katherine Sleeman, Dr Jeffrey Stephenson, Dr Michael Stockton, Professor Patrick Stone, Dr Michael Tapley, Dr Ros Taylor, Dr Dee Traue, Dr Victoria Wheatley, Dr Derek Willis