

Nicola Sturgeon MSP
First Minister
Scottish Parliament
EDINBURGH

11 May 2022

Dear Nicola

Assisted Dying and Palliative Care

“.....allowing people to have good deaths through good palliative care is really important, and I think it’s vital we don’t lose focus on that.” (Nicola Sturgeon, Daily Record 4th May 2022)

I am writing to thank you for your recent very welcome affirmation of the importance of delivering high quality palliative care for the people of Scotland, and to ask you to consider two practical steps to improve palliative care in Scotland.

About the Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care

The Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care (SPPC) exists to improve palliative care, a mission shared with our membership which encompasses all the NHS Boards, IJBs, Local Authorities, hospices, and multiple health charities and professional associations. SPPC does not adopt a position in principle either in support or in opposition to a change in the law on assisted dying. This approach is explained in our recent response to the consultation on Liam McArthur’s current proposal, which can be read [here](#).

As an organisation we are very clear that:-

- There remain very significant deficits in the provision of palliative care¹ in Scotland
- That the ready availability of reliably good palliative care should be a fundamental vital safeguard for vulnerable people in any jurisdiction where assisted dying is legalised (we are all potentially vulnerable at the end of life).

In considering the proposal to legalise assisted dying in Scotland we will be asking all MSPs to commit to two things.

Firstly, we are asking MSPs to ensure that people in Scotland have an explicit legal right to palliative and end of life care. The forthcoming Scottish Human Rights Bill provides a timely and very appropriate vehicle for achieving this (and could make Scotland the first country in the world to enshrine such a right in domestic legislation).

Secondly/...cont.

¹ We are talking here about care provided to people approaching the end of life across the health and social care system – in hospitals, care homes and at home – not just the specialist providers such as hospices and NHS specialist palliative care units which provide excellent care. 1 in 3 hospital beds are used by people in the last year of life. Most people in care homes for older people are in the last 18 months of life.

Secondly, we are asking MSPs to support investment in palliative care. The proponents of assisted dying in Scotland argue that legalising assisted dying leads to increased investment in palliative care. However, there is no logical necessity to this, and there are many jurisdictions where this has not happened. The last national strategy on palliative care was accompanied by a level of funding which suggested a lack of appreciation of the scale of improvement required. The forthcoming new Scottish Government national strategy for Palliative and End of Life Care provides a timely mechanism through which priorities for long overdue and necessary improvements can be identified and funding assigned. SPPC's recent report [Every Story's Ending](#) identifies a comprehensive agenda for improvement.

We hope that all MSPs will feel able commit to supporting the two practical steps we are proposing regardless of the view they reach on assisted dying and the outcome of the legislative process.

Thank you for your continued interest in palliative care. I would be happy to facilitate a meeting with leaders in palliative care to discuss the issues raised in this letter.

Best wishes



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Scottish Partnership for Palliative Care

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