

Baroness Finlay of Llandaff and Baroness Grey-Thomson of Eaglescliffe

An Open Letter from the Rt Revd James Jones KBE former Bishop of Liverpool

Dear Ilora and Tanni,

Since leaving the House of Lords in 2013 I was asked by the Government to write two independent Reports which, I believe, are relevant to the Health and Care Bill and amendment 297 'to permit the terminally ill ... to end their own lives with medical assistance'. In 2017 I wrote a Report on learning from those bereaved through the Hillsborough Disaster. The Report to which the Government has yet to respond is called 'The Patronising Disposition of Unaccountable Power'. Then in 2018 I published the Report into the early deaths of over 450 patients at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital in the mid to late 1990s.

The Report of the Gosport Independent Panel has led to a criminal investigation (Operation Magenta) which is ongoing and constrains me from adding to what is already in the public domain. The Panel found that 'the lives of over 450 patients were shortened' and that 'there was a disregard for human life and a culture of shortening the lives of a large number of patients by prescribing and administering 'dangerous doses' of a hazardous combination of medication not clinically indicated or justified'.

Since the publication of the Report bereaved relatives from across the country have contacted me with similar accounts and concerns.

If prescribing such fatal doses could happen with the law and safeguarding as they now stand then I fear what might develop if the law and culture are changed to permit the ending of life 'with medical assistance'.

Following my work as the Chair of the Hillsborough Independent Panel I wrote a Report to help us learn from the families' traumatic experiences at the hands of the State. I observed, in a different context, the patronising way that a range of State agencies treated ordinary people.

I acknowledge the good intentions of those behind this amendment but I do not share their assumption that the treatment of the seriously ill will always be benign in the hands of the State.

I fear the patronising disposition of unaccountable power in our institutions when treating those who have little power to speak up for themselves. I know that noble Lords would expect those with power to act in a benign way but my knowledge of what happened after the Hillsborough Disaster and allegedly at the Gosport War Memorial Hospital and elsewhere where ordinary people have been badly treated gives me no such confidence.

To change the culture of caring in favour of providing 'medical assistance' for patients to 'end their own lives' creates too many risks and leaves us unprotected from the patronising way in which institutions, including sadly Hospital Trusts, can behave towards ordinary people especially when they are under pressure and struggling with diminishing resources.

Yours sincerely,

James

The Right Reverend James Jones KBE

16th January 2022

