

Response ID ANON-RS6Y-1QYB-H

Submitted to Assisted Dying for Terminally Ill Adults (Scotland) Bill: Detailed Consultation – Call for Views
Submitted on 2024-08-16 08:48:48

About you

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I have read and understood how the personal data I provide will be used.

Important information about responding to this consultation

I confirm I have read the information above and would like my response to be published in its entirety

What is your name?

Name:
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Are you responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation?

Organisation

Organisation details

Name of organisation

Name of organisation:
Royal Pharmaceutical Society Scotland

Information about your organisation

Please add information about your organisation in the box below:

The Royal Pharmaceutical Society, Scotland is the professional body for pharmacists and pharmacy and our mission is to put pharmacy at the forefront of healthcare.

Since the Society was founded in 1841 we have championed the profession, and are internationally renowned as publishers of medicines information. Our Royal Charter gives us a unique status in pharmacy.

We promote pharmacy in the media and government, lead the way in medicines information, and support pharmacists in their education and development.

Question 1 - Overarching question

Which of the following best reflects your views on the Bill?

Neutral/Don't know

Space for further comment on your answer:

The ability of pharmacists (and other healthcare professionals) to express their right to conscientiously object is of vital importance.

Royal Pharmaceutical Society has had differing legal advice on whether section 18 is in the competence of the Scottish Parliament. If not in competence, there is a risk that pharmacists will not be able to conscientiously object.

If section 18 is found to be in competence, conscientious objection would only cover the activities described in the Bill and not associated, indirect activities which could include assembly, preparation and supply of medicine. There is a risk with the Bill as drafted that pharmacists may be compelled to support a process which they may have moral, ethical or religious objections to.

We note that section 18 puts the burden of proof for conscientious objection on the individual, which may privilege some healthcare professionals (e.g. those who evidence a connection to a faith-based group), over others. This is different from the conscious section in the Abortion Act (1967) which states, "a statement on oath by any person to the effect that he has a conscientious objection to participating in any treatment authorised by this Act shall be sufficient evidence". *

For the above reasons, we opine that it is vital that an opt in section is written into the Bill. This should allow pharmacists and other healthcare professionals to opt out of any or all activities which would support assisted dying (whether this was directly or indirectly). This would enable pharmacists

and other healthcare professionals to support the process if they were comfortable to do so but would not compel anyone to be involved if they felt uncomfortable. This would not only support individual healthcare professionals but would ensure the best patient care and experience.

Which of the following factors are most important to you when considering the issue of assisted dying? Please rank a maximum of three options.

ranking important factors - Impact on healthcare professionals and the doctor/patient relationship:

ranking important factors - Personal autonomy:

ranking important factors - Personal dignity:

ranking important factors - Reducing suffering:

ranking important factors - Risk of coercion of vulnerable people:

ranking important factors - Risk of devaluing lives of vulnerable groups:

ranking important factors - Sanctity of life:

ranking important factors - Risk of eligibility being broadened and safeguards reduced over time:

ranking important factors - Other – please provide further details in the text box (200 characters max):

If you selected Other, please provide your answer in the text box below:

Space for further comment on your answer:

Question 2 - Eligibility

Which of the following most closely matches your opinion on the terminal illness criterion for determining eligibility for assisted dying?

Other – please provide further details in the text box (200 characters max)

If you selected Other, please provide your answer in the text box below:

Royal Pharmaceutical Society is neutral on the principle of Assisted Dying. We do not have a policy on eligibility.

Space for further comment on your answer:

Which of the following most closely matches your opinion on the minimum age at which people should be eligible for assisted dying?

Other – please provide further details in the text box (200 characters max)

If you selected Other, please provide your answer in the text box below:

Royal Pharmaceutical Society is neutral on the principle of Assisted Dying. We do not have a policy on eligibility.

Space for further comment on your answer:

Question 3 - The Assisted Dying procedure and procedural safeguards

Which of the following most closely matches your opinion on the Assisted Dying procedure and the procedural safeguards set out in the Bill?

Other – please provide further details in the text box (200 characters max)

If you selected Other, please provide your answer in the text box below:

The Assisted Dying procedure references pharmacists, but only briefly, and it is not clear what is expected of pharmacists as part of this process.

Space for further comment on your answer:

The Bill states that when visiting the patient, the coordinating medical practitioner or authorised health professional may be accompanied by any other health professional as that practitioner or authorised health professional thinks necessary. Pharmacists are one of only three health professionals listed as being eligible to accompany the coordinating medical practitioner (alongside Doctors and Nurses).

To strengthen the procedure from a pharmaceutical perspective, the role of pharmacists should be clearly articulated. It is odd that as currently drafted, a pharmacist would be present in some circumstances, but not present in others. There should be clear expectations and a consistent process particularly around responsibility for the substance at all stages of the process.

Question 4 – Method of dying

Which of the following most closely matches your opinion on this aspect of the Bill?

Other – please provide further details in the text box (200 characters max)

If you selected Other, please provide your answer in the text box below:

Royal Pharmaceutical Society is neutral on the principle of Assisted Dying. We do not have a policy on method of dying. We think there is a significant gap in the Bill in this section.

Space for further comment on your answer:

There is a risk that the substance which is given to someone so they can end their own life, either does not work or produces an unforeseen circumstance, for example, the person may choke on or vomit the substance. As the Bill is currently drafted, a healthcare professional would be unable to intervene in circumstances which have the potential to be extremely physically uncomfortable and/or emotionally distressing. It is important that all the potential clinical scenarios are thought through in detail before the legislation is passed to limit any physical or emotional discomfort for the patient and healthcare professionals who will be involved in the process.

Question 5 - Health professionals

Which of the following most closely matches your opinion on how the Bill may affect the medical profession? Tick all that apply.

Other – please provide further details in the text box (200 characters max)

If you selected Other, please provide your answer in the text box below:

Our comments are limited to the effect of the Bill on Pharmacists. However, as outlined above, we have significant concerns about the efficacy of the opt out as described in the Bill.

Space for further comment on your answer:

Question 6 - Death certification

Which of the following most closely matches your opinion on recording the cause of death?

Other – please provide further details in the text box (200 characters max)

If you selected Other, please provide your answer in the text box below:

Royal Pharmaceutical Society does not have a policy on how assisted deaths should be certified. However, it is important that researchers can draw accurate conclusions about the cause of death.

Space for further comment on your answer:

This is fundamentally important to understanding population trends and for the creation of evidence-based policy. Full health and demographic data for those who access assisted dying services will be essential to inform future service development and funding going forward.

Question 7 – Reporting and review requirements

Which of the following most closely matches your opinion on the reporting and review requirements set out in the Bill?

The reporting and review requirements should be extended to increase transparency

If you selected Other, please provide your answer in the text box below:

Full health and demographic data for those who access assisted dying services will be essential to inform future service development and funding going forward.

Space for further comment on your answer:

Adverse events, harm, near misses or unintended events related to any aspect of the provision of this service must also be recorded and reviewed regularly. This will enable the identification of issues not previously mitigated against or emerging harms.

Question 8 – Any other comments on the Bill

Do you have any other comments in relation to the Bill?

Please use this textbox to provide your answer:

None.