

Right to die ruling

Relatives of people who kill themselves will not face prosecution as long as they do not maliciously encourage them and assist only a 'clear settled and informed wish' to commit suicide, the Director of Public Prosecution said on 23rd September 2009.

Keir Starmer QC outlined guidance to make it easier for those helping someone commit assisted suicide to know if they will face prosecution.

The move comes after the Law Lords backed a call by multiple sclerosis sufferer Debbie Purdy, for a policy statement on whether people who help someone commit suicide should be prosecuted. The maximum penalty for assisting someone to end their life is presently fourteen years imprisonment. More than 100 Britons have ended their lives at the Dignitas clinic in Switzerland, but until now, friends or relatives who accompany them have not known if they will face prosecution.

People have strong wishes about the circumstances in which they would not wish to be resuscitated or receive specific medical treatment. There are certain legally binding documents that can be prepared to set out a person's wishes for medical practitioners to follow.

A Lasting Power of Attorney – Welfare Decisions

A Lasting Power of Attorney enables you to appoint a person or persons to make decisions on your behalf with respect to your welfare if you are unable to make these decisions yourself. These decisions would include where you should live, daily decisions on your diet and wellbeing and also medical decisions. If you wish, your Attorney can make decisions refusing medical treatment, which can include refusing any life sustaining medical treatment if you so instruct. Additional guidance can be detailed within the Lasting Power of Attorney, governing the circumstances where you would not wish to receive life sustaining treatment, so that your Attorney can follow your wishes.

Advanced Decision or Living Will

An advanced decision or living will, is a document in which you set out the circumstances in which you would or would not like to receive specific medical treatment. This differs from a Lasting Power of Attorney (Personal Welfare) as you are not giving anyone the specific authority to make decisions on your behalf. An advanced decision or living will shall be overridden by a Lasting Power of Attorney (Personal Welfare) where you have given the Attorney authority to make decisions about life sustaining treatment.



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