

## **Open letter to all Members of Parliament**

Dear Member,

I write in the knowledge that if you receive this letter, I will have succeeded in taking my own life. I have given this letter to the South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society, to be used as they think fit, after my death.

I am a 56 year old senior manager, at the pinnacle of my career as journalist and editor both in Australia and overseas, until forced last year to stop working due to rapid deterioration of my health.

It is with bitter irony that I reflect, as I prepare for the traumatic yet carefully considered act of taking my life, that in all respects other than my unbearable physical and spiritual suffering, I have everything to live for: intelligent, happy and successful adult children, an enjoyable relationship with close and supportive friends, a challenging and rewarding career, a passion for learning foreign languages and opportunities to travel overseas, a beautiful near city home which I own freehold, a comfortable financial position, and a strong commitment to and enjoyment in helping others.

Yet my reasons for feeling forced to end my life outweigh all of the above. They are simple and compelling: excruciating, intolerable physical pain caused by a severe, twisted curvature of my spine; Sjogren's Syndrome – an auto-immune system disease causing severe dry eyes, soft tissue damage and muscle degeneration; a rheumatic disorder; and Chondrocalcinosis - calcium deposits on my knees.

The ongoing, relentless agony caused by this combination of incurable medical problems is intractable. It can not be controlled by physical therapy or medication. The latter actually causes problems of its own. Morphine, for example exacerbates my dry eyes which have now ulcerated, thus causing difficulty in reading and sensitivity to light. This poses a possible threat to my vision. Orthopaedic surgery, using steel rods to partially correct my spinal deformity, has a 50%, lifelong complication rate, including the risk of paraplegia, massive infection, breakage of the rods and high potential for ongoing or even worsening pain.

I am unable to sit, and can not stand for periods of longer than 10 minutes. My condition forces me to spend my days lying stretched out over hot water bottles on a bed or sofa, inserting moisturising eye gel every 15 minutes. My pain is of such intensity that I can not concentrate on reading or writing, or enjoy the company of others. I am unable to make any contribution to my family, community or society at large. The prognosis of surgeons and medical specialists of various disciplines is that my condition will continue to deteriorate. As my condition is not terminal and I have a strong heart, I face the horrific prospect of this intolerable existence for another 25 years or more.

It is most important for you to know that I have tried many avenues for relief of my suffering, at my own expense. Apart from my GP and 2 orthopaedic surgeons, I have consulted with the following medical specialists:

- A palliative care specialist
- Two neurosurgeons
- Five ophthalmologists
- Two pain management specialists
- Alternative therapists
- Physiotherapists
- Chiropractors
- A rheumatologist
- A physician
- and finally a Pain Clinic which insisted that I be assessed by a psychiatrist, psychologist and physiotherapist before a pain management programme could be devised.

Meanwhile my condition deteriorates daily and my pain increases.

I simply can not continue.

I know that in a democratic, compassionate and civilised society I ought to have the freedom to ask a willing doctor to provide me with a quick and peaceful death by means of a lethal injection. Instead, with the reality of the present law, I am forced to suffer. It is a cruel and heartless law that only offers an escape from this nightmare by such alternatives as starving myself to death or resorting to violent means to end my life.

If in South Australia we had voluntary euthanasia legislation with safeguards, as exists in the Netherlands and Belgium, imagine the comfort and peace of mind for myself and others who are suffering torturous lives and whose only chance of relief is through death.

I would have the freedom to discuss my decision openly with family and friends and to have them with me when I choose to die. Instead, and in addition to my unbearable suffering, I am burdened with the strain of having to work out covertly how to end my life, with the least possible impact on my family, and face the fear – in fact terror – of the horrific consequences of failure.

Members of Parliament, while it will be too late to benefit me personally, I plead with you as lawmakers to enact responsible legislation which will simply give the community of South Australia

THE RIGHT TO CHOOSE.