

RENDEZVIEW

Palliative care is just sneaky euthanasia and I wish I hadn't put my mum through it

THE hospice where my mother received palliative care let her die while I sat and watched, writes Vanessa de Largie. My decision to put her there haunts me every day.

Vanessa de Largie

RENDEZVIEW

May 31, 2017 1:41pm



 Who is anyone else to decide someone has a life not worth living? (Pic: iStock)

THE hospice let my mother die while I sat and watched.

I'd been called in for an appointment with the hospice staff where I was cornered in an office and bullied into agreeing that 'a care pathway' was the best option for my Mum.

It would allow her to die with 'dignity and zero pain' they told me.

In western society, we are taught not to question the medical profession because they are knowledgeable and supposedly want the best outcome for our loved ones.

Nurses had come to our home and seen me struggling with my mum's care as she was dying from a malignant brain tumour, and suggested palliative care might be the best course of action.

I regrettably gave the palliative care team the green light, a choice I have to live with for the rest of my days.

In theory, palliative care sounds like a kind and humane approach in treating patients.

Its objective is to give comfort in one's final days instead of artificially prolonging one's life, which is considered cruel by most.



 Andrew Denton is one of Australia's most recognisable voluntary euthanasia advocates. (Pic: Kelly)

But sadly in practice, palliative care has metamorphosed into something very different — for numerous patients it's become a backdoor form of [euthanasia](#). Palliative care claims not to 'hasten death' yet on the contrary this is happening frequently.

Elderly patients, like my mother are being heavily sedated and deprived of fluids and nutrients which dehydrates and starves them to speed up the process. And this isn't only happening in Australia, this is happening in countries around the world.

In 2012, Professor Patrick Pullicino, a neurologist and professor of clinical neurosciences at Kent University, told a conference that the Liverpool Care Practice in the UK had become an 'assisted death pathway' for more than 100,000 patients each year.

"Very likely, many elderly patients who could live substantially longer are being killed by the LCP," he said.

As a daughter who cared for both her terminally ill parents up until their deaths. I can tell you that family members are often not fit either to make decisions on behalf of their relatives.

Under the stress that accompanies their relative's medical condition they are unable to comprehend what the doctors and nurses are doing or saying. I speak from first-hand experience.



 Tasmanian campaigners for voluntary euthanasia laws in Hobart this month. (Pic: Andrew Drummond/AAP)

I'd already signed my mother out of a hospital and taken her home because they were drugging her up unnecessarily. What made me take such drastic action is a nurse questioned me on why I wouldn't let them euthanise my mother, as apparently it was obvious to everybody but me, that my mother was on her last legs.

Mum lived for another several months at home and I'm so glad I trusted my heart and got her the-hell-out-of-there because otherwise she would have been killed a lot sooner.

The label 'dying' is haphazardly applied to terminally ill or elderly patients in which medical experts deem have lives that are not worth living. When in many cases these patients are not dying at all and have weeks or months of life ahead of them.

And how can anyone really judge another human being's 'quality' of life? It comes down to perspective.

Nothing illustrates this point as well as the incredible story of 43-year-old Richard Rudd who has a condition called locked-in syndrome, which leaves him unable to speak or move his limbs even though he can think, hear and feel.

After lying comatose on a life support machine, his parents arrived at a terrible conclusion to turn the machine off. Thankfully, despite his spinal injuries Rudd was still able to blink his eyes in response to questions. And asked if he wanted to stay alive, he answered a categoric 'yes'.

Rudd's father admitted that he was convinced that in 'a million years' his son wouldn't want to live with his injuries.

"When we are healthy and in good condition, it's easy to say you would want to be switched off but when it actually happens it's completely different," he said. "Making a 'living will' could be

detrimental to your own health. Imagine if you changed your mind but couldn't communicate it."

Every day, I live with horrific guilt in regards to my mother's death in a hospice as do thousands of other Australians and people from around the world. Yet society wants to sanitise euthanasia sending us down a slippery slope of grey and murky murderous acts.

I can never get my mother back. I can never withdraw the decision I made in that hospice office under duress. But I can use my writing and personal experience to try and shed light on this issue.

I don't want any family member anywhere to have to go through what I went through.

Vanessa de Largie is an actor, journalist, author and sex-columnist based in London.