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Title: Debbie Purdy; her contribution to the law on assisted suicide, the present and the future

Following the death of Debbie Purdy, an active campaigner in favour of assisted suicide in December 2014, this paper will critically evaluate whether the guidelines issued by the DPP following the case of R (on the application of Purdy) v Director of Public Prosecutions 2009 UKHL 45 are fit for purpose and whether the Assisted Dying Bill 2013, currently being debated in the House of Lords is an essential change in the law in England and Wales. It will be argued that the guidelines issued (DPP Policy for Prosecutors in Respect of Cases of Encouraging or Assisting Suicide 2010) may have succeeded in addressing short term issues but it is only the introduction of legislation that will address the longer term ambition of decriminalising assisted suicide.

Given the overwhelming public support of legislation in favour of assisted suicide in England and Wales, despite the fundamental rejection by the medical profession, this paper, which supports the introduction of law permitting assisted dying, will also examine the ethical arguments surrounding this topical yet controversial area of the law. The arguments relating to dignity and autonomy will be explored together with the counter argument relating to sanctity of life. The real difficulties of ensuring a person has been not pressurised will be analysed together with the potential risk of abuse, the potentially damaging effect on the doctor-patient relationship and the fear of the slippery slope.

The paper will conclude that the ethical arguments in favour of assisted suicide outweigh the counter arguments and that the Assisted Dying Bill 2013 must proceed in order to allow people the chance to determine for themselves when to end their life.