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Now the Dutch turn against legalised mercy killing

By [Simon Caldwell](#)

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Architect: Els Borst guided the euthanasia law through the Dutch parliament

Legalised euthanasia has led to a severe decline in the quality of care for terminally-ill patients in Holland, it has been claimed.

Many ask to die 'out of fear' because of an absence of effective pain relief, according to a new book.

Even the architect of the controversial law has admitted she may have made a mistake in pushing it through because of its impact on services for the elderly.

Holland was the first country in the world to legalise euthanasia, in 2002.

But Dr Els Borst, the former Health Minister and Deputy Prime Minister who guided the law through the Dutch parliament, now says it was brought in 'far too early'.

Without elaborating, she admitted that medical care for the terminally-ill had declined since the law came into effect.

She said more should have been done legally to protect people who wanted to die natural deaths.

'In the Netherlands, we first listened to the political and societal demand in favour of euthanasia,' said Dr Borst. 'Obviously, this was not in the proper order.'

The former hospital doctor made her remarks in an interview with researcher Dr Anne-Marie The, for a book on the history of euthanasia called Redeemer Under God.

Dr The, who has studied euthanasia for 15 years, said that palliative care was so inadequate in Holland that patients 'often ask for euthanasia out of fear' of dying in agony because care and pain relief is so poor.

She added that a crisis had developed and that 'to think that we have neatly arranged everything by adopting the euthanasia law is an illusion'.

Phyllis Bowman of Right to Life, a British group opposed to euthanasia, said she had witnessed pro-euthanasia campaigners picket hospices in Holland.

She said it was so bad that Amsterdam, which has a population of 1.2million people, is now served by just two tiny hospices.



Clarification: Keir Starmer, the Director of Public Prosecutions, was asked to define when someone should be prosecuted for assisting suicide

'People were marching round the building shouting and roaring and were screaming that the hospice was denying people their right to die,' she said.

'The pro-euthanasia campaigners set out to smash the hospice movement. People can no longer get palliative care when they need it - they just get an injection.'

The Dutch euthanasia law gives doctors immunity from prosecution if they help to kill patients over the age of 12 who are suffering unbearably from incurable conditions and who have repeatedly requested euthanasia.

It is usually carried out by administering a strong sedative to put the patient in a coma, followed by a drug to stop the breathing and cause death.

Cases of euthanasia in the country have increased from 1,626 in 2003 to 2,331 in 2008. It is also alleged that there have been thousands of cases of involuntary euthanasia and dozens of killings of disabled newborns.

Campaigners in Britain said Dr Borst's remarks showed the dangers of legalising euthanasia in the UK.

Dr Peter Saunders, from the Care Not Killing Alliance, an umbrella group of more than 50 disabled, medical and religious charities, said: 'If you introduce guidelines that help people to avoid prosecution then you will get a huge escalation of cases.'

Fears that Britain might introduce a euthanasia law have been mounting since Law Lords ordered Keir Starmer, the Director of Public Prosecutions, to clarify when a person should be prosecuted for assisting suicide.

His guidance, published in September, said prosecution was likely if the 'victim' was under 18, had a mental illness or was in good physical health. Assisting in more than one case or being paid for assistance would also lead to prosecution.

Although it does not guarantee anyone immunity, it says a criminal action is unlikely if the victim had a grave illness or disability, was determined to kill themselves and was a close friend or relative of a helper, who was motivated by compassion.

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There should be no need for 'Mercy Killing' which is a very slippery slope to go down. It wouldn't be the first time an elderly person has 'allowed to die' in order that their organs can be used for transplant.

Palliative care in my opinion is very very good - but it can be improved and not always by using the Liverpool Care Pathway as an end of life care. Diagnosing dying is not an exact science and never will be - therefore it is essential for clinicians to make daily assessments of patients who are put on the LCP - to be absolutely certain that this is right and in the best interest of each individual patient to die peacefully, painlessly and with dignity.

- Anne, North Yorkshire, 10/12/2009 00:37

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I just had someone in my family who died this way - in Holland few days ago.

She had cancer and the doctor told, there was no advancement in curing cancer during the last 20 years AT ALL, they can treat it but that is all - no cure. She went through lots of chemo, radiation and huge amount of pills and during the last three months she was suffering greatly, no improvements. 10 days ago, she got the flu and she was told, her flu can be cured but not the cancer, so she can decide whether to die from the flu plus "help" or not. She was also an organ donor, so I suspect

they wanted her organs as well, as soon as possible. She was suffering greatly and wanted to be over with and it was an arranged procedure with her approval. I have seen her body before the funeral and can tell, they removed everything "removable" as well. So much about the above subject and the donor issue...

- Lizzy, Holland, 09/12/2009 20:42

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It would be nice if anyone who writes this sort of piece had actually read the book or knew anything at all about Holland.

This is so misquoted that is almost laughable if it weren't that people who read it take it seriously. Having been at the launch of the book and seeing the lectures given I think I might be more qualified to comment than most. Do your writers have to agree to rule 5 of the house rules? It would seem not.

- Faye, Amsterdam, 09/12/2009 18:26

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Quality of life is everything. Without quality, quantity means nothing.

- srb, st. leonards, 09/12/2009 12:32

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Ghastly. This is a salutary warning to those with rose-tinted ideas about how to easily and conveniently "exit" people who are considered a burden because too old or too disabled. I have met a couple of Dutch doctors and I have to say I was far from impressed. Uncaring is the word that comes to mind. British society must never go down the "it's better for them to die" line, because that line is a slope to perdition.

- Ian Millard, Exeter UK, 09/12/2009 12:27

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