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Four faces of courage: Paola Marra ended her life last week at the Dignitas Clinic in Switzerland.

Should assisted dying be legal? The moving last words of a terminal cancer patient who ended her life have reopened the debate on voluntary suicide in the UK

What's happening?

A video shows a sad but determined woman: "As you watch this I am dead," she tells the camera. "But you watching this could help change the laws around **assisted dying**."

The woman is called Paola Marra and she lived in London. She was 53 years old when she ended her life at the Dignitas Clinic in Switzerland.

Find out more

Marra had been suffering from bowel cancer and, as she says in the video, "I'm choosing to seek assisted dying because I refuse to let a **terminal illness** dictate the terms of my death."

Suicide is not illegal in the UK, but helping someone to commit suicide is a crime in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, which could lead to 14 years in prison.

In Canada, Austria, Spain, parts of Australia and the US, doctors can prescribe **lethal** drugs to terminally ill patients who ask to die, and similar laws exist in Belgium, Netherlands and Luxembourg.

Labour leader Keir Starmer thinks the current system in England is unfair, and governments in Scotland, Jersey and the Isle of Man are all thinking about changing their rules.

The campaign group Dignity in Dying argues: "When death is inevitable, suffering should not be." According to some surveys, most people in the UK population support a change to the law, and many would be prepared to help someone they love to die.

However, any change in the law might pressure more **vulnerable** people to commit suicide. According to another campaigning organisation, Care not Killing, most doctors do not want to see a change in the law around assisted dying.

Killing someone is a crime, even if they ask you to do it, but should the same laws apply when ending someone's life might be the kindest thing to do?

Should assisted dying be legal?

Some say

Yes! It is **compassionate** to allow terminally ill people to decide when and how they die. It reduces suffering.

Others think

No! The current law is clear and protects the most vulnerable people. Changes put unfair pressure on doctors and the dying to end their life quickly.

Some people say

"I think those who have a terminal illness and are in great pain should have the right to choose to end their lives and those that help them should be free from prosecution. We don't let animals suffer, so why humans?"

**Stephen Hawking (1942 – 2018),
English physicist and author**

What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Is anyone in your family very old or very ill? How does this story make you feel?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: is suffering unavoidable if you're sick or old?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing you know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - Imagine a TV reporter asked you about assisted dying. What would you say?

5. Express

What do others believe? - In groups, come up with another reason in favour of assisted dying and another against.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Imagine that you are very old and ill. Write a story describing your experiences, how you feel and what you want for your future.

Glossary

assisted dying - helping a person to end their life

terminal illness - an illness that cannot be cured

lethal - to cause death

vulnerable - at risk of being harmed

Compassionate - Showing understanding and sympathy to people who are suffering.