

Why suicide is never elegant and stylish

NICK GOIRAN



As an experienced MP, I am accustomed to being wrongly accused of a number of things. Normally I let it slide, but I can't let the unbalanced and unfair article, "Forced to watch loved ones in pain", slip past.

In *The Sunday Times* last week it was reported: "WA Liberal and staunch euthanasia opponent Nick Goiran has cruelly claimed there is nothing stopping West Australians with terminal diseases from killing themselves."

I was then quoted: "Even though it is not a choice that we encourage or that we endorse, suicide is a choice that is available to Western Australians. They have the liberty to take their own life."

The report continued: "His words, taken from an address at a euthanasia prevention conference in the US earlier this year . . ."

I find the implication — that I am cruelly indifferent to Western Australians taking their life — highly offensive.

Had I been contacted prior to publication, I would have provided two key pieces of information.

First, I was invited to speak in New Mexico in January to talk about my experience on the WA parliamentary inquiry into "End of Life Choices".

Second, it was the view of the entire parliamentary committee that suicide is a legal end-of-life option. Specifically, the committee said in its tabled report: "Currently the lawful options for ending life may include

refusal of medical treatment; refusal of food and fluids; decisions taken in relation to futility of treatment; terminal sedation or suicide."

As I was not enamoured with the quality of the report, I tabled my own 248-page report in which I said that, as the law currently stands, there are end-of-life choices such as "medical treatment, especially palliative care, and including if necessary palliative sedation therapy, the refusal of medical treatment, the refusal of hydration and nutrition and suicide".

To add context, the report went on to say: "While the final choice, of suicide, is a choice that is available to Western Australians, it is certainly not a choice which the State encourages or promotes. In fact, suicide prevention policies and programs have had long standing bipartisan support, as every life in this State matters. Nevertheless, Western Australians have the liberty to choose suicide. Herein lies the important distinction between liberty and license.

"The choice that is currently not available to Western Australians is that of assisted suicide. This report concludes that . . . assisted suicide should remain illegal in WA. While it is one thing to have the liberty to suicide,

it is quite another for the State to grant medical practitioners a licence to kill patients through assisted suicide."

We have a significant suicide problem in WA and this is no time for dangerous mixed messages. The world's first 3D-printable suicide machine has been on show in Australia. Exit International's director and suicide machine inventor, Philip Nitschke, said

he hoped the machine will appeal to those seeking an "elegant and stylish" death under Victoria's new euthanasia laws.

He also travelled to Switzerland with Dr David Goodall in May last year, where Dr Goodall's assisted suicide took place after repeated failed attempts.

In contrast, Dr Michael

Gannon, then president of the Australian Medical Association, expressed concern that the suicide of someone aged 104 was being celebrated and wondered: "What is the age at which we no longer celebrate people continuing with life?"

Dr Gannon went on to say: "I have serious concerns about a community where we make arbitrary decisions about whose life is valuable enough to continue and whose should be ended under the law."

Suicide is never elegant and stylish. It is always a tragic loss.

Nick Goiran MLC is the Liberal member for South Metropolitan Region.