

When we have well-funded palliative and social care, we...

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It was [only a few weeks ago](#) that the Telegraph reported that:

The state of end-of-life care in the UK means the country is not ready for assisted dying, Wes Streeting has suggested.

The Health and Social Care Secretary has previously voted in favour of having an “in principle” debate on the ethical question, but declared himself “conflicted” on the issue.

Now, the House of Commons is to have a free vote on the issue, and nothing has changed.

As a matter of fact UK hospice care is wholly inadequate, which is not a reflection on those charities seeking to provide it. What is absurd is that this is thought to be an issue for charities to deal with.

It is equally true that palliative care within hospitals is underfunded. It would seem as if the UK state is willing to invest in us as long as there is a chance of returning us to the workforce, but when the time comes that we will, inevitably, not do so, it no longer cares.

This worries me in itself. Without any discussion about assisted dying, palliative care needs much more investment. People should have the right to die as painlessly and with as much dignity as possible. When most of us will die over a period of time in our old age, that seems like a pretty basic thing for the NHS to do, and it does not do it well at present.

There is more to this than that, though. Nor do we have proper social care plans for the elderly either, and with Labour having abandoned plans to cap some social care costs for the elderly needing residential care, matters have made no progress there.

Now, there is a discussion of assisted dying. Excuse me for being cynical, but I do see a connection, and I do not like it. Pressure from some families on elderly relatives to

consider this route when otherwise the value of any potential inheritance might fall, potentially significantly, will grow. Evidence from other countries suggests that this is what has happened. And that is decidedly unhealthy.

For once, Wes Streeting was right. When the option of a dignified natural death is available, then we might discuss assisted dying for those who want to consider it. But right now, austerity is denying us that opportunity. That means we cannot afford the risk from assisted dying. The required checks and balances are not just medical. It is also that real alternatives have to be available to those facing their own deaths, and right now, the economics of denial is preventing that. When that is sorted, there will be time for this debate. But we are not there yet.