

## “Coronation Street” re- ignites the Assisted Suicide debate

Who would have thought it – the fate of a fictional TV soap character might just lead to a change in the law. Hayley Cropper was a slightly unusual character in Coronation Street who previously had had a sex change, then married a somewhat eccentric spouse, and eventually was diagnosed with terminal cancer. This was perhaps eventful enough for any one life, but it was the ending of that life which seems to have transfixed the nation. Hayley chose suicide rather than await death from her illness, and her dutiful spouse Roy if not acting as an assistant in this plan pretty well went along with his wife’s wishes.

Most commentators felt the story made for good TV but probably nobody would have predicted the explosion of interest generated in the subject of being able to choose when and where and how you want to die. Social media were inundated with hundreds of thousands stating their views on assisted dying, most newspapers carried columns on the issue and subsequent TV shows have also covered the issues raised. And all this has happened whilst bills are before both the Scottish and UK parliaments which if passed would legalise some method of assisted dying.

These bills have dedicated supporters and also equally dedicated opponents – all very passionate in their views. For example the current view of the British Medical Association is to oppose all forms of assisted dying. On the other hand the Humanist Society is in favour. These are just two examples – many organisations take positions and it is possible to see merit in arguments for and against.

Margo Macdonald’s last Scottish bill was overwhelmingly defeated in 2010 and a series of similar attempts in the UK Parliament have failed in the last decade. Thus far our political leaders have rejected assisted dying – but the fact is that poll after poll has shown very substantial support for it among the general public. Will Hayley Cropper’s fate and the debate now raging change any views and bring legislation nearer? Who knows – we’ll just have to wait and see.

It is legally possible in Scotland to retain control of how you may die – short of asking for assisted suicide. Interested readers should read the guides to powers of attorney and advance directives on [www.solicitorsforolderpeoplescotland.co.uk](http://www.solicitorsforolderpeoplescotland.co.uk) and further information from the NHS is available on <http://www.nhs.uk/Planners/end-of-life-care/Pages/what-is-end-of-life-care.aspx>