

JBIMA Editorial

Prof Sharif Kaf Al-Ghazal, Editor in Chief

Assalamo Alaikom all,

Regular readers will be aware that editorials in the past few years have generally been sombre. Whether commenting on the challenges of the pandemic or more recently, the genocide in Gaza, the tone has not been celebratory. And whilst there is a recognition that all is not necessarily well in the country, or the world (the people of Gaza are yet to experience justice), we should celebrate the fact that not long ago, the assisted dying bill has failed in the House of Lords. This is welcome news.

In the December 2024 edition of JBIMA, I included in my editorial concerns that many expressed about the assisted dying bill, and the apprehensions that the Muslim healthcare community made clear in particular. The bill itself was repeatedly criticised by Members of Parliaments across all sides and was clearly a divisive subject; in an era of political and societal polarisation, it split opinion further and contributed to pitting citizens against one another far more than it did to unify, no matter what its proponents said. The ethico-legal dimension of assisted dying was always an especially deep concern amongst the medical community as the practice – had it gone ahead – would shift the paradigm of what it means to be a doctor. Instead of our role as medical professionals being solely the prevention, treatment and cure of disease and injury, our role could have shifted to what the Home Secretary Shabana Mahmood called a “state death service”.

It is encouraging to see that the public mood on this issue is changing. The bill failed in the House of Lords as the institution did its job to scrutinise and critique pieces of proposed legislation, and experts in the House clearly felt that it did not meet the required standards to become law.

As the bill failed, there were some expected groans from its proponents and those who have campaigned on the

issue, but interestingly, there was no outpouring of emotion from the public or the expected feeling of complaints that it did not pass. The House of Lords is an imperfect institution which is generally misunderstood and critiqued by society, but in this instance, it did its role.

Whilst we celebrate, we cannot take the credit; our role in this debate has been small, and we must acknowledge the advocacy efforts of others in this space. When I reflect on the failure of the bill to pass, I remember my meeting with Baroness Ilora Finlay, a professor of palliative medicine, alongside Dr Nadia Khan, a consultant in palliative care in the House of Lords on the 20th of March 2019. This was 7 years ago, and Baroness Finlay and Dr Khan are amongst those who led advocacy efforts against this bill as specialists in this area of medicine. It is remarkable to think that all those years ago conversations were taking place to think about how we would be lobbying against any legalisation of assisted dying.

The battle is not over yet. It is not inconceivable that another private members bill is submitted and chosen on this very issue in the next parliament. The public mood on this and its divisiveness as a topic mean that it is unlikely to become a pledge included in a manifesto by a mainstream political party anytime soon (which would make the House of Lords blocking it far more controversial).

We live to fight another day. We ask Allah (SWT) to guide us to the right path.

Wassalam.

Prof. Sharif Kaf Al-Ghazal
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