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Another mercy killing for Davison?

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By Carlo Petersen and Ashfak Mohamed

Cape Town - Euthanasia campaigner Sean Davison - who assisted his mother Patricia and others to end their lives - has declined to respond to reports he is once more helping a terminally ill patient to die.

If so, he could face a murder charge.

The patient, whose name is being withheld by the Cape Times, has declined to comment.

Davison became an international advocate for the terminally ill's right to "dignified deaths" after his arrest in New Zealand in 2010, when he helped his mother, 85, commit suicide.



Sean Davison and his mother Patricia

A source had told the Cape Times that Davison would be assisting a patient with motor neuron disease to commit suicide on Tuesday afternoon.

"Davison would be using gas to end the patient's life at 4pm on July 14 at a residence in Fresnaye," the source said.

When the Cape Times contacted Davison on Monday, he said: "Where did you get that information from? I cannot confirm or deny that. I can't comment about (the patient). This is a private matter which should not be publicised in the media.

"One should respect people's right to die in a dignified manner. (The patient) has been suffering for a long time."

Contacted again on Tuesday, Davison insisted on speaking only to the Cape Times editor, but his demand was declined and the news editor contacted him.

Asked if he would be involved in an assisted suicide on Tuesday, Davison said: "I can't comment on that. Who says there is a story here. He (the patient) doesn't want this in the media.

"This is a private matter. It is up to the patient if he wants this in the media. If you run this story, you are crossing the line."

The source relayed that the patient had been in the care of St Luke's Hospice. "I am privy to this information following a discussion at St Luke's when they were requested to assist, but they had the good sense not to become involved."

Dr Shelley Kibel, of St Luke's Hospice's care team management, said: "We are aware of this patient and have provided home-based services in the past.

"Although it is our intention to be as helpful as possible to the press, we are bound by professional secrecy not to divulge more than the bare minimum of information without the patient's consent. St Luke's Hospice's policy is to neither hasten nor to postpone death.

"We do not support euthanasia in any form. This view is in keeping with the Hospice Palliative Care Association position paper on euthanasia."

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When the Cape Times asked the patient about the allegations on Tuesday, he said: "No comment."

A former UWC professor, Davison admitted in 2010 to crushing 18 morphine tablets and mixing it into a glass of water before handing it to his mother, who had cancer.

In November 2013, Davison helped Dr Anrich Burger - a quadriplegic following an accident in 2005 - commit suicide.

Burger had contacted Davison to show support for Dignity SA, an organisation Davison founded in 2011 after serving five months' house arrest in New Zealand, the country of his birth. He is still running the organisation.

After Burger's death, Davison said he was not worried about facing criminal charges.

He was charged with attempted murder, but entered a plea bargain and pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of assisted suicide. Davison returned to South Africa in May 2012.

Davison has written about his mother's death, *Before We Say Goodbye*, and penned a second book on subsequent events, *After We Say Goodbye*.

Earlier this year, 65-year-old terminally ill prostate cancer sufferer Robin James Stransham-Ford, 65, approached Davison to take to court his plight to be allowed an assisted suicide.

North Gauteng High Court Judge Hans Fabricius ruled in his favour on April 30, but Stransham-Ford had died two hours earlier.

Judge Fabricius refused an application by the government to rescind his ruling, saying the Constitutional Court was best equipped to make a ruling on the matter.

Department of Justice and Correctional Services spokesperson advocate Mthunzi Mhaga said yesterday the government had applied for leave to appeal against that judgment on June 2.

"We are still busy submitting some documents to the Supreme Court of Appeal and will await their response. We have not been given a date yet," he said.

Mhaga said if Davison was indeed assisting another person with suicide, he could be charged with murder.

"He cannot do that. If he does that, he is committing murder. He has to realise that the recent judgment was specific to that case and we are busy appealing that decision.

"If there is enough evidence that he has broken the law, he will be arrested and charged with murder," Mhaga said.

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