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[Western Cape](#) [Gauteng](#) [Mpumalanga](#) [Limpopo](#) [Eastern Cape](#) [North West](#) [Northern Cape](#) [K](#)

## Prof: I won't assist in euthanasia again

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**Cape Town - Sean Davison, the professor who recently helped a South African doctor end his life, said on Saturday he would not be willing to assist in euthanasia again.**

"Anrich Burger was a very close friend. I wouldn't want to ever go through that again. It was very stressful," said Davison in an interview with Sapa.

"It was a very personal experience... This was for someone who was desperate to die and in extreme pain. I was helping him out of compassion."

Davison has become an advocate for the right to assisted dying after he was arrested in New Zealand in 2010 for helping his mother - aged 85 at the time and who had terminal cancer - to die.

This week, it was confirmed that in November 2013, Davison had also helped Burger die. Burger had been left a quadriplegic following an accident in 2005.

The University of Western Cape professor said that he first met Burger after the doctor had contacted him to show support for Dignity SA, the organisation Davison founded in 2011 after his ordeal in New Zealand.

"This started a very good friendship," said Davison.

He said he was unperturbed about whether his assistance to Burger could now lead to criminal charges.



Sean Davison, the professor who recently helped a SA doctor end his life, said he would not be willing to assist in euthanasia again. File picture: Henk Kruger

"I would be worried if there was something to worry about."

Burger had stated very clearly that he wanted to die and organised his own medication for the process, said Davison.

Davison returned to South Africa from New Zealand in May 2012, after serving a five-month detention for helping his mother end her life.

She initially tried going on a hunger strike, but when that failed he gave her a lethal dose of morphine.

In 2011, Davison was originally charged in the Dunedin High Court, New Zealand with attempted murder but later entered a plea bargain whereby he pleaded guilty to a lesser charge of assisted suicide.

During Davison's five month house arrest, he was separated from his partner, Raine Pan, and his two sons who remained at the family's home in Cape Town.

On Saturday, Davison said Dignity SA was now preparing to take a draft bill dealing with assisted dying to Parliament.

The legal criteria proposed for euthanasia was that the person requesting assisted dying must have made the choice on their own; must be suffering from a terminal illness and would have to be in a sane state of mind. The request would also have to be reviewed by an independent source.

Davison said his organisation hoped to canvas all political parties to endorse the change in legislation before the draft bill even went before Parliament.

This approach to Parliament was "imminent," he said.

"We are going to do it this year."

Davison said he believed there was a lot of support for a change in legislation. He also felt the country's "very liberal" Constitution was in the cause's favour.

"My feeling is that the mood of the country doesn't reflect the current law."

Davison said his own family was "very supportive" of his work in promoting the legalisation of euthanasia.

He was confident that by the time he would have to explain the cause to his children - his sons, now aged six and eight, and a baby girl, aged eight months - assisted dying would already have been made legal.

Davison also said Dignity SA's other mandate - "to inform the public about the issue" - had been given a great boost through Archbishop Desmond Tutu's support.

"That made a huge difference because of the high esteem the man is held in."

In July, this year, Tutu, in his private capacity, wrote an opinion piece in the British Observer newspaper about assisted dying.

Tutu said that he had realised he did not want his own life to be artificially prolonged.

"Now I wish to apply my mind to the issue of dignity for the dying," he said at the time.

Tutu's encouragement was important because he was seen as a man of the Church and came from a traditional African background, said Davison.

Culture should not be a divisive factor in accepting the right of assisted dying.

"I think for most people, when they consider the issue, it is about compassion and kindness."

In general, society needed to overcome its reluctance to talk about death and dying, he suggested.

Death was the common experience of all; and many would be exposed to painful and undignified deaths of family members.

"That's every reason to embrace and talk about it, and don't make it a scary issue," said Davison.

**Sapa**