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**Transcript:** AMA President, Dr Michael Gannon, with Helen Dalley, Sky News Live, ‘The Latest’, Friday 20 October 2017

**Topics:** Victoria’s Assisted Dying Legislation

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**HELEN DALLEY:** Returning now to our earlier story about Victoria's controversial assisted dying legislation. For more on this, I'm joined by the president of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Michael Gannon.

Dr Gannon, thanks very much for being with us. Now the voluntary euthanasia legislation, it passed the Victorian lower house, it still has to go to the upper house. What will the AMA be telling the politicians? To block it?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, we're disappointed with the result in the lower house but the members there did their job. It's the responsibility, the duty of parliamentarians to make laws on behalf of their citizens.

What we will be doing is putting our statement in front of members of the Legislative Council, asking them to perform their duty as the house of review to make sure that they can do something better for the citizens of Victoria when it comes to better end of life care.

**HELEN DALLEY:** So sorry, will you be asking them to block it?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Our position is that this bill is not good for Victorians; it sends the wrong signal to Parliaments in other parts of Australia. It's the Parliamentarians who decide, but certainly I will be talking to members of the Legislative Council, putting to them the concerns of doctors, putting in front of them the AMA's really carefully thought-out position statement ...

**HELEN DALLEY:** [Interrupts] Alright, and your carefully thought-out position statement; is it that doctors oppose interventions that have as their primary intention the end of a person's life, is that right?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** That is exactly right. That's the exact wording and that is consistent with, in many ways, centuries of medical ethics and the position statements of national medical associations across most of the world.

**HELEN DALLEY:** Well, you are on the record as being against it personally. Former Prime Minister Paul Keating, he weighed in at the eleventh hour yesterday to say that voluntary euthanasia is an ethical threshold that Australia should not cross. He said today it's deeply regressive, as we understand, in a statement, and an abrogation of the core instinct to survive.

Malcolm Turnbull also said on radio today that he would vote against it. Do you think it can be twisted, or the rules bent by unethical doctors, by unethical family members, nursing homes?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, we have great concerns about whether or not you can build the appropriate protections into this. One thing I will say, I would object to your use of the word unethical doctors or nurses. I have no doubt at all that those of my colleagues who favour euthanasia, physician assisted suicide, those Parliamentarians who voted for it by a majority of

10 today; I don't doubt for one moment their compassion, their desire to do the right thing for their citizens. But what we would implore members of the upper house to do ...

**HELEN DALLEY:** [Interrupts] No, I'm not suggesting that, because former Prime Minister Paul Keating, he talked about that issue, that not as it stands now but that the rules could be bent by some unethical folk who might try and assist somebody dying who doesn't fit, who isn't protected already by the very strong protections that are built into this legislation, who are not perhaps terminally ill.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Yes, I mean, I would argue how strong the protections in this particular Bill are, for a start. But certainly we've seen that in other parts of the world. There are, not only in the Netherlands is there an increase year on year on the number of people that this is the way they die, through euthanasia or physician assisted suicide, but the record keeping's not perfect, and even within this Bill we see this perverse idea that doctors will be asked not to write euthanasia assisted suicide on the death certificate. How will we truly measure this new law if it does come to pass?

**HELEN DALLEY:** But now, earlier in the week the AMA had to apologise to the Victorian Premier because of a tweet that you posted saying - I think I've got this right - the law shouldn't be changed because a few powerful people see a parent die. That's a fairly harsh tweet. Do you resile from that; your organisation had to apologise over it.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** My organisation didn't apologise, but my colleagues in Victoria felt the need to do that, and they have very important relationships with the Premier and the Health Minister in their State.

I was disappointed that that upset people. I don't doubt for one moment the pain that the people who've spoken of their experiences. The point I was making there and the point I will continue to make is that that grief is so strong, it is so personal, it is so profound; that cannot be the mechanism by which we make a public policy.

We need to think very carefully beyond this very small part of end of life care and consider how this fundamentally changes the relationship between doctor and patient and, as Mr Keating has asserted, potentially changes society.

**HELEN DALLEY:** Yeah, Dr Gannon, it is interesting though because if - I mean this legislation is pretty- is very tight. It says that somebody must be terminally ill. They must be going to die within 12 months - isn't that correct - and that they have to be in pain. So, to many ordinary Australians, they would say well, I mean, isn't it more humane to allow them to have some choice about their end of life and to stop them bearing that pain for the last few months of their life?

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Well, we understand the thirst for this law change in the community, and again we respect the right of Parliamentarians to make laws on behalf of their citizens.

What we've been most concerned about is the role of doctors in this; this is against centuries of medical ethics, it's against the thing you get taught on day one of medical school, that you do not take a patient's life. Your job is to respect the sanctity of human life.

We know that this narrow Bill is a source of great disappointment to some famous and infamous euthanasia advocates. The fear that Mr Keating expressed, the fear that many other people express, is that the law will be extended over time. We've seen that in other jurisdictions where there has been an extension to people, for example, with mental illness, with dementia, in some jurisdictions to children. We worry that this ...

**HELEN DALLEY:** [Interrupts] But this isn't contained in this.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** No, you are right. This is a very narrowly focused Bill, but there is nothing stopping those changes to the law in the future.

**HELEN DALLEY:** Yeah, alright.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** This is a line that would be crossed if the upper house votes in favour of the law. We think, as doctors, that the Parliamentarians could have done better if they want to improve end of life care for Victorians.

**HELEN DALLEY:** Alright. Well it is obviously a very difficult issue for doctors. Dr Michael Gannon, from the Australian Medical Association, thanks for joining us.

**MICHAEL GANNON:** Pleasure, Helen.

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