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Diminished responsibility

Decisions must be made

TODAY Prof Harry Kennedy raises the ever-more pertinent question — on the next page — about when one person should be responsible for making decisions for or about another? He also wonders who should make decisions for us if we are incapacitated.

Already the European Court of Human Rights found that Britain was in breach for failing to modernise its law concerning people who were unable to make their own decisions by reason of unsoundness of mind.

These questions are becoming ever more relevant as advances in medicine extend life expectancy. Once virtually nonexistent, the world's population of centenarians is projected to reach nearly six million by mid-century. The number of centenarians has jumped from an estimated few thousand in 1950 to more than 340,000 today, the highest concentrations in the US and Japan.

This trend, and the tragedy of mental illness, suggest that we need to have this discussion rather than impose another Irish solution to a well-flagged problem.

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