



Our Mission: To bring about such changes in Western Australian Statute Law and to medical ethics as will allow a person to receive medically assisted euthanasia under circumstances specified by him or her, when legally competent to do so.

How to educate 1,000 doctors in six months

“Almost two-thirds of doctors did not understand WA’s new living wills legislation which passed through State Parliament in June last month (Ed: June 2008), giving dying people the right to decide the medical treatment they receive and giving doctors legal protection from criminal and civil liability when carrying out those wishes.”

The West Australian, 5th July 2008.

What a sad indictment, this is!

In passing the Consent to Medical Treatment Bill in the Upper House in June last year, the State Parliament promised to fund “an education campaign” to inform medical practitioners and the general public of their new rights and obligations. The writer fears that this is likely to be at the very bottom of the government’s priority list and it could be a long, long time before any such public education campaign occurs.

In the meantime, we have nothing to lose by educating our own doctors. Given that we have about 1,000 members and that we probably each see our GP once every six months or less, we could have 1,000 educated GP’s before the government even thinks to snap its purse open. The conversation could go something like this:

Patient: Hello Doctor. Lovely weather for ducks, isn’t it? I’m just here for the usual blood pressure check up.

Doctor: Hello Mr Jones. You’re looking well. Have a seat and roll up your sleeve, please.

Patient: (while doctor checks blood pressure) So what do you think of the new living wills legislation in WA, Doctor? That Consent to Medical Treatment thing?

Doctor: I don’t know what you’re talking about, Mr Jones. What is that? *Cont page 2*



Notice of A GENERAL MEETING

**Wednesday, 17th June 2009
at 2 pm**

Citiplace Community Centre

on the walkway between the Art
Gallery and Myer Store opposite
the escalators at Perth Railway
Station

Afternoon tea provided

All welcome

How to educate 1,000 Doctors in six months - continued

Patient: Well, it's this Bill that's been passed in the Upper House recently and that's about to be passed in the Lower House and then gazetted into law. It means that a person of sound mind can document the fact that they do not wish to receive life-prolonging treatment if their illness is terminal, and the doctor is then legally obliged to follow the person's instructions. The document is called a "Living Will".

Doctor: Over my dead body! I'll decide what's in the best interests of my patients. Where there's life there's hope. You wouldn't want me to discontinue treatment for you, would you?

Patient: Well, as a matter of fact, under certain circumstances I would. Of course, I'd still want you to give me as much pain relief as possible, but I'd also want to know that, even if I fell into a coma or were unable to speak to you for some other reason, that you'd respect my wish to refuse futile, life-prolonging treatment. So I took the precaution of bringing you a photocopy of my Living Will. Here it is, duly signed by me. See, my signature was witnessed by these two people who are as sound of mind as I am – their names and contact details are also included. Please put that on my file "just in case". It explains everything I want and don't want.

Doctor: But Mr Jones, you can't be serious! Up until now, it's been the medical practitioner's decision whether to give or withhold treatment. What if I refuse to follow your instructions?

Patient: Then you could be sued for assault, Doctor.

Doctor: Well, what about my Hippocratic oath? I'm sworn to save and protect life at all costs. I'd be struck off the medical register and sent to prison if I didn't do all I could to keep you alive, irrespective of your wishes.

Patient: Actually, no, Doctor. Not now. The new legislation gives you legal protection as long as my will has been recently made, was made at a time when I was still of sound mind and has been properly witnessed. Thanks for putting it away in my file.

Doctor: Oh! Well, that puts a bit of a different light on it. You can roll your sleeve down again now, Mr Jones. I'll ring the AMA and find out why they haven't done anything to inform me about all this.

Patient: Good idea, Doctor.

Off the record:

Once gazetted into law, the Consent to Medical Treatment Bill will spell out what category of person constitutes an acceptable witness. It is likely to exclude friends and relatives and to favour specific categories of person instead. People may then have to have their living will re-witnessed in order to conform. However, in the meantime, we should still protect ourselves by having a signed, witnessed, living will using witnesses deemed by ourselves to be suitable. If unsure, please contact the WAVES office.

Ann David

Détente ~ Dignity



Being sentenced to die against one's will is as appalling
as being sentenced to live against one's will.
Governments may yet have the nous to support those
who need to live, and die, with equal sensitivity:
Access to a law recognising this long overlooked aspect of equality;
Assist those, who feel comforted by palliative care as much
as those who dare to work for another way out of pain;
Advocates for a life-regardless may yet acknowledge
the altruism of a life and a death.

Joyce Parkes



Letter from the President

Since I wrote to you in our February news-letter about the *Acts Amendment (Consent to Medical Treatment) Act, 2008*, I am afraid nothing has happened. People may be forgiven if they think that a certain amount of foot-dragging is in operation here. I must admit that there are a few regulations to be drawn up and a certain amount of paper work to be tidied, but should it take so long to make a start? The Government may be busy with what they consider far weightier matters, but may I remind the Minister that to the elderly a clear end-of-life decision is worth a lot and, more often than not, is the most important thought in their minds.

On a more positive note, have you seen how many letters on VE are appearing in the daily newspaper? The mood and the views expressed are overwhelmingly in favour of legalisation of voluntary euthanasia. I hope and pray that our parliamentarians are reading and listening. Just in case they are still wrapped up in their own cocoons, do call in the electorate office of your local member. Let him/her know what you are thinking; write a letter to point out that it is an important subject for you and that a Parliamentarian's first job is to represent the views of the electorate.

During the last Community Cabinet Meeting we were fortunate to be able to meet the Federal Attorney-General for a few minutes. That is as far as our good fortune lasted. We were confronted with a totally closed mind and a completely blinkered outlook. It was amazing to find someone so unaware of the situation and with absolutely no desire and/or ability to appreciate facts or even hear of it. A totally head-in-the-sand attitude! It does make one question the function and ethics of a people's representative. However, appreciating that he had little time to consider my case, I have written to him in the hope that he will give the matter a little more time and thought, if and when he has the time.

The voluntary euthanasia societies in various states have decided to meet at the end of this year to draw up some plans and perhaps explore some common grounds for what remains our

common goal, which is legalisation of voluntary euthanasia. I realise that there is a wide divergence of views as to what form it should take and, hopefully, there will be some discussion on that. This meeting is a precursor to the biennial world conference of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies, which is due to take place in Melbourne in 2010. Even if nothing else comes out of it, we hope that the two meetings will put the question of voluntary euthanasia firmly in the minds of the media and the people.

As I have often said that, although Dr Philip Nitschke's Exit International is a separate organisation, we both work towards a common goal. We appreciate his campaign; we admire his compassion and understand his views. So we were very surprised and taken aback by the attack mounted against him by various voluntary euthanasia societies, apparently spearheaded by Dying With Dignity, previously named Voluntary Euthanasia Society of England.

We understand that, as a Society committed to law reform, we cannot and perhaps should not provide any practical help to anyone seeking end-of-life help. But I would like to think that we are lobbying for law reform because we know that there are people who are crying out for help. We certainly hope that we are compassionate and understanding and sympathise with the anguish suffered by a lot of people. We cannot help them, but should we criticise those who do? Will that not be hypocritical? Do we not appreciate there may be other paths to our common goal or are we so caught up in our own struggle that we cannot appreciate another view?

These are troubling questions and I would urge you to think about them. You may have to confront them sooner than you think. In the meantime we should not weaken our cause by internal wrangling. Our timid politicians would like nothing better than to split the movement, so they will not have to make a decision.

Cont page 4



Letter from the President - *continued*

We wrote to you in the last newsletter about Senator Bob Brown's Bill and requested all of you to write to the state senators. I have to make an apology – Senator Brown's Bill is now called *Restoring Territory Rights (Voluntary Euthanasia Legislation) Bill 2008*. This bill will restore to the Territory legislature the right to enact legislation regarding voluntary euthanasia.

I thank all who wrote and others who are thinking of writing. Together we shall prevail. Do not be discouraged by the negative answers that you may get from some of the Senators. We shall just make a note that they are not in favour of a gentle death and perhaps do not

want one themselves. Senators Cormann and Eggleston certainly fall into that category.

At the Annual General Meeting in October your Committee will have to step down and fresh elections are to be held. In view of important decisions to be taken, it will be wonderful if we can have a fresh set of ideas in the shape of a new and energised committee and an enthusiastic executive. So I would suggest that you consider nominating for the Committee. You have nearly five months to think about it. I can promise you a very light work load, but an exciting time ahead where your thoughts and input will be greatly valued.

My Petition Report

In June 2008, driven by my personal experiences of the prolonged and horrible deaths of 10 friends and 17 family members (youngest 23, eldest 95) by terminal or hopeless illness, and by the arrogance and apathy of our elected so-called 'representatives', I knew I wanted more than that - I needed to do 'something'. So I decided to mount a personal campaign and present a Petition to Parliament.

I distributed 1400 copies to members of WAVES, EXIT WA, the GREENS, voters at the recent election, family and friends. If all had been signed (10 signatures per copy) this would have delivered a massive 14000 names. I received 136 returns with a total of 1233 signatures.

I have spent some time analysing the results and came up with the following information:

Many returns had only 1 or 2 signatures but others, working hard and/or having many more contacts, collected 25+ signatures. Mr Owen Loneragan deserves a Gold Medal. He collected more than 80 signatures!

I received many notes of thanks, support and encouragement, a few of whom mentioned that many people, who professed support for VE, refused to sign the petition saying "Oh, but I can't possibly sign anything until I see the legislation." Unbelievable really, but I know it to be true, as a close relative of mine who, in three short years lost her mother, 24 year old daughter and her

husband to hideous cancers, wouldn't sign for the very same reason.

I looked at the ages, when provided - some people were shy. By far the largest numbers of signatures were in the 60+ age bracket. The youngest was 17, the eldest 99!

I've not studied the addresses closely, but a quick scan indicated that the SW region, especially Albany, the East Metro, Western suburbs and inner city showed much support. My observations appear to confirm what our volunteers found at the election booths.

I thank you all for your help, support and encouragement. I had hoped for a 'Skyworks Spectacular', but managed only a 'Sparkler'. Oh well, "Back into the fray, dear friends – tomorrow is another day".

Pamela Barrett

*WAVES applauds your effort, Pamela.
Remember: even Sparklers have the potential to ignite huge fires.*

Christians for VE - open support at last !

On 12th November 2008, the Hon Mark Parnell, Greens MLC in South Australia, introduced a Greens Private Members Bill, the Consent to Medical Treatment and Palliative Care (Voluntary Euthanasia) Amendment Bill. This bill proposes active voluntary euthanasia.

The Hon. Mark Parnell began his speech to Parliament quite candidly: “This bill is about voluntary euthanasia”. He went on to affirm that he himself is a member of SAVES (South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society). He explained that the vital difference in his bill is that it focuses on the “rights of the sufferer” rather than on the “protection of doctors”. Perhaps his most enlightening inclusion was his reference to a Christian chaplain’s view on voluntary euthanasia, provided to him in a letter.

The Hon Parnell introduced it as follows:

“I want to read briefly from a letter that I received about a year ago from Reverend Trevor Bensch, who is the Baptist chaplain at the Queen Elizabeth Hospital and the Calvary Hospital in Adelaide. Reverend Bensch wrote to me — I imagine he wrote to other members of parliament as well — in connection with the Voluntary Euthanasia Bill that the Hon. Bob Such introduced into the House of Assembly. I spoke to Reverend Bensch recently and obtained his permission to use his name and to quote his letter in Hansard. He wrote:

My approach to the issue of voluntary euthanasia is from the position of a liberal Christian who seeks to find the way that is most consistent with what we know about the teaching and example of Jesus. The guidance that I get, mainly from the four gospels, could be put under four headings:

- 1. The importance of every individual person.***
- 2. The need to make the most of each day.***
- 3. The obligation to relieve illness and suffering wherever possible.***
- 4. To do for others what you would want them to do for you.***

My support for voluntary euthanasia comes from these with an element of my own selfishness. I had no control over my entry into this world but I want some control over the exit. I want the right to say when I have finally had enough.

Through many years of hospital chaplaincy I have continued to be inspired by the courage with which most people bear serious illness, even when it is terminal, but I cannot agree with those who say suffering is good.

He concludes his letter by saying:

Of the Christian values, compassion must surely be near the top of the list. I urge you to support and vote for the Bob Such Voluntary Euthanasia Bill.

And there we have it: a liberal Christian minister who is publicly prepared to give greater weight to compassion and understanding than to religious dogma. Thank you, Reverend Bensch.

As a result of this recent reading in Parliament, a group of South Australians has been inspired to start up the “Christians supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia” movement, with Mr Ian Wood as their spokesperson and co-ordinator. This group, consisting of moderate Christians of all denominations, believes that the principles of love and compassion that inspire voluntary euthanasia are wholly consistent with the teachings of Jesus. They draw a distinction between their own more liberal views and the hardline dogmatism of fundamentalist Christians who are the true opponents of VE.

To signal your support for this open-minded group, email ChristiansforVE@westnet.com.au or write to Ian Wood at 429 Anzac Road, Port Pirie SA 5540. They are looking for “facts and stories” or just messages of support from fellow Christians. The group will use your messages to lobby those politicians who like to pretend that religion and VE can’t mix. Yes, of course they will be targeting South Australian politicians, but if just one state in Australia adopts VE legislation, then all other states and territories will find it that much harder to ignore it.

Ann David

Opinions

In this column we invite you to write to us about any VE issues you would like to discuss or experiences you want to share. Please keep your letter short and send to our address for attention "The Editor WAVES NEWS". Your letters may be edited for publishing.

FEAR OF FRAIL CARE

In early 1980 I was asked by the President of my Lions Club to establish an Old Age Home in the mountain area in another country, where I lived. So, I organised a committee of capable men and women, and we set to work, running fund raising activities. This also helped to raise public awareness of the need, as the government provided assistance but not ready funding. In the course of our investigations some committee members visited the capital city to see various old age homes. It was then that we realised the array of problems we had to confront.

My greatest shock was the first time I entered a dining room in a frail care facility. It seemed so degrading for grown persons to be fed like babies. Perhaps those being fed were actually better off than those still trying to handle a spoon for themselves. The plastic-covered tables designed to cope with spilled food, the entire scene made me wonder what sort of world I had blundered into.

Of course the committee went on with its work. It was difficult raising enough money, but we did get a donation of land in the centre of one village. The project ended when it came to light that the elderly, interested in entering the home, argued over which village the Old Age Home would be in. Those living in the village, where the land had not been donated, refused to consider living in the nearby village. "Everyone knows it is much colder there" was a standard comment. In the end our committee threw in the towel and donated the funds to a good cause. Eventually the cold snows and frosts of winter reminded me that I, too, was ageing, and I decided I had seen the last of the beautiful mountains.

But I still fear being unable to control my own body. I dread the lack of dignity of being fed by someone I do not know. I particularly abominate the idea of someone helping me to the toilet. I wish to be permitted by law for a doctor to help me slip away peacefully. Then, when I feel it is time, I could part from friends and family in relaxed comfort.

William Stokes

IS THIS HOW WE LOOK AFTER THE ELDERLY WE LOVE ?

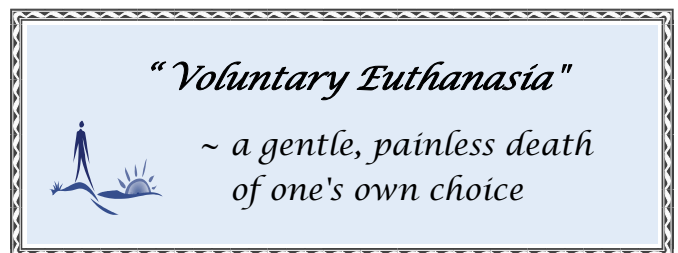
I have a friend who lives in the eastern states, whose mother lives in a nursing home here in Perth. Apart from her son, who visits her when he is able, she has few other visitors, so occasionally I will call to see how she is.

She has been in this home for a number of years and is in her late nineties. Mentally she is in good shape but has been going down-hill physically for some time and has had a number of falls while going to the toilet. These falls, as you can imagine, have taken a toll on her health and enjoyment of life and she is now confined to a chair and wheelchair. In addition to this she has a large umbilical hernia, which is inoperable as a result of her age. This hernia protrudes into the front of her nightdress which, when I last visited, was splashed around the hem with stains, which could only have come from her last trip to the toilet.

During our discussions over the past couple of years she has expressed her distress at being kept alive with constant medication and readily says that she has had a good life and cannot understand why her doctor persists with her medication which in her eyes only prolongs her discomfort. She finds it hard to accept that her only way out is to refuse medication and food as others in the institution have been forced to do.

This woman has a great sense of humor and it is tragic to see her slowly disappearing into her chair. Surely the time has come, that the right to die of the failing aged is acknowledged.

Murray Hindle.



Notice Board

Membership Issues

Overdue Membership Subscriptions

Please, remember that our current membership year runs from 1st of July 2008 to 30th of June 2009. Your co-operation in settling overdue accounts is much appreciated.

When paying directly into our bank account, please make sure we have all your details to identify the payment?

Oops have we made an error?

If we, by mistake, have not updated our database with your latest payment or other notified changes, please let us know.

We do our best to be absolutely punctual, but sometimes things slip through the system.

We apologise for any inconvenience and thank you for your patience.

Any Volunteers ?

Unemployed? Retired and bored? Looking for something meaningful to do? We have a job for you!

There are lots of easy - or challenging, if you prefer - things to do, new skills to gain, many interesting people to meet.

WAVES' Committee will step down and elections will be held at the AGM in October this year. We hope to be able to welcome many enthusiastic applicants to continue the good work.

All you need is commitment, willingness to learn new things and to be prepared to work as part of a team.

If you are passionate about VE law reform, then this is your chance to make it happen. Think about it?

Nomination forms are available from our Secretary – tel. 9277 5577

West Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society (Inc)

PO Box 7243, Cloisters Square, Perth 6850 – Phone 9277 5577

Email: info@waves.org.au

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM

Membership year runs from 1st of July to 30th of June of the following year

Standard Rates

- Single \$ 20
- Double \$ 30
- Life Single \$ 200
- Life Double \$ 300
- Donation \$

Pensioner / Student Rates

- Single \$ 15
- Double \$ 25
- Life Single \$ 150
- Life Double \$ 250
- (Rates effective from 1st July 2009)

Payable to WAVES at the above address or at any BankWest branch:

Account **WAVES - BSB no: 306-061, account no: 419 8239.**

Please complete this form and forward to us, or bring it with you to the meeting.

Mr&Mrs Mr Mrs Ms Miss Dr

Please print clearly

Initials Surname

Address

Postcode Phone Year of birth:

Email

EXIT News

EXIT International welcomes WAVES' members to join their organisation and points out that only Exit members are allowed to attend the meetings.

Please phone Carol O'Neil on 0429 039 167 for further details.



W.A.V.E.S has no religious, professional or political affiliation. Its membership comprises a wide range of people - some from a variety of professions, including medical and nursing; some from religious denominations and some politicians. Many have publicly expressed their support for the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia, both passive and active.

PARTICIPATE IN OUR CAUSE

You can help us make Voluntary Euthanasia a legal choice. Explain it to your friends and family. Write, phone or visit your State MP.

Make your views known !

WEST AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA SOCIETY (Inc)

ABN 16 953 675 488

Postal address:

WAVES

PO Box 7243 Cloisters Square

Perth WA 6850

Australia

Phone: 9387 5126, 9277 5577

E-mail: info@waves.org.au

Internet: www.waves.org.au

Management Committee 2008

President: Ranjan Ray

Vice-Presidents: Dr Ralph White/ Murray Hindle

Hon Secretary: Brian Ross

Hon Treasurer: Murray Hindle

Committee Members

Nelly Brandsma, Tina Christensen, Linda Savage, Sheila Suttner, Stephen Walker

WAVES NEWS

If undelivered please return to:

PO Box 7243

Cloisters Square

PERTH WA 6850

Print Post Approved

PP 607 603 / 1117