



A word from our President

I take this opportunity to wish all members and readers of our newsletter a very happy and peaceful New Year. Let us all hope that 2006 will also be a successful year.

2005, the Society's twenty-fifth year of formation, was a fruitful year in that there was a glimmer of hope for our elderly members. We did get some slight, only slight mind you, encouragement from the Government. But then Governments are known to promise a lot and deliver very little. In my last letter I mentioned the "Discussion Paper" released by the Attorney-General, which, I believe, had attracted a fair number of submissions. The next step is under consideration of the Government, and that is all that is public knowledge at the moment. I am rather afraid that, behind the scenes, lobbying and discussions are taking place and that WAVES has not been invited to be a participant. As a Society, which has been longest in the field of speaking for and on behalf of the patients, we are surely the best placed to be consulted. Alas, the Attorney-General does not seem to think so.

We have written to the Minister and the Premier, and anyone else who will listen, to say that we stand ready to provide inputs in any meaningful deliberation towards a compassionate and just bill. So far we have not had a positive reply. We intend to lobby every politician, who will talk to us, and we will leave no stone unturned, but I am not holding my breath. Politicians appear to think little beyond the next election.

We would welcome a frank, open and meaningful debate on the subject of end-of-life choices, but not a dialogue full of meaningless clichés and inane remarks. We have received letters from the AMA, both Federal and State, extolling the virtues of palliative care. We have heard from Palliative Care Associations that palliative care is the ultimate panacea, but what do the patients say? Have they been asked for their opinion? The Government is not interested and the health professionals seem to have closed minds. There is an occasional cry from the heart of desperate people and, if they are lucky, the press may pick it up. We get a splash in the newspapers with all the gory details of the unfortunate sufferer, and then everything reverts to normal and all is forgotten. Is this how a caring society should behave? Where is our compassion? Where is our concern for a fellow human being?

You may have read in the papers about Jack Kennedy and his unfortunate case. He wants his choice, but Mr McGinty says "No". 93% of the population say "Yes", but Mr McGinty feels he can ignore this. In the meantime enough anecdotal evidence exists to show us that the rich and powerful manage to skirt the law with impunity and no one questions that.

I had the pleasure of attending the biennial conference of Exit International in Brisbane. It was a pleasure because it was a gathering of honest, concerned and

compassionate people who talked about end-of-life choices without humbug or clichés. Practical ways were discussed without any morbidity or depression. "Dignity" was frequently mentioned as was "choice". It was an uplifting experience.

Your Management Committee is wrestling with the question of changing the name of our Society. Times have changed and "euthanasia" is often mentioned without "voluntary" attached to it. Perhaps "dignity" or "choice" may better describe what we want. The Committee welcomes any suggestions or comments on the question. Of course the final decision remains the prerogative of the General Body. The Committee is also looking at updating the Advance Directive. We will discuss these issues in our next GM and we will keep our members informed.

The "Medical Treatment for the Dying Bill", or whatever the Government decides to call it, may be introduced into the Parliament in the Autumn Session, which starts in March. Once again we shall keep you informed of any progress. Keep your powder dry, we may need it.