

Dying with Dignity ACT Inc.

Everyone deserves a peaceful death

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Bulletin No 18

September 2018

This Bulletin must begin with an apology. Due to my absence in South Africa at the World Federation of Right to Die Conference we omitted to inform you that the Public Meeting we thought we could organize in September had to be cancelled due to various speakers we approached not being available on that day. I believe some members went to the Grant Cameron Community Centre thinking that there would be a meeting.

Apart from having trouble with speakers we also had trouble making contact with members of the media who seem only to be interested in euthanasia when they can speak to some poor, miserable person who is dying or when there is some activity occurring in the Legislative Assembly. They are not interested in public meetings and extended discussion about the matter. Note for example the cancellation of Marshall Perron's speech at the Press Club.

Since I returned I have been in touch with Kiki Paul, CEO of Go Gentle Australia who has agreed to speak to us on the **15th October at 2.00 p.m.** That is a **Monday**, not our usual Thursday. You are welcome to invite friends to attend this meeting at the **Grant Cameron Community Centre** at **27 Mulley St Holder** in the large meeting room on the ground floor. The topic of Kiki's speech will be the Go Gentle campaign in Victoria in aid of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act.

This week I received a message from Jack White to let me know that he is unable to continue on the committee due to problems with his eyesight. Jack has been treasurer and committee member for the last five or more years. He has been a conscientious and skilled treasurer who raised the standards of our volunteer committee. I thank Jack for his commitment to Dying with Dignity ACT.

The Committee is taking this opportunity to invite one or more additional members to join the committee. I invite interested members to please ring or email me. My email is president@dwdact.org.au and DWD's phone is 51040920 (please leave a message on the answering machine).

I can report to you that the World Federation of Right to Die Conference in Capetown with its theme of the right to die being our human right was highly successful. It was smaller than past conferences but very well run and what was very interesting was a number of speeches given by South Africans who are working in the area of human rights. South Africa's constitution is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights so there was naturally a lot of interest in this theme by lawyers, academics and politicians in talking about the relevance of human rights legislation to the right to die. I was particularly impressed by the Chief Executive Officer of the South African Human Rights Commission Tseliso Thipanyane who took the view in his speech that dying with dignity is not just for people who are dying of a disease but also for those who wish to end their lives at any time.

A number of the South African lawyers noted that despite their constitution being based on human rights law, South African politicians are reluctant to apply the rule of law when it comes to the right to die and argue it is against South African culture. Tseliso said that

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he had pointed out to them that if they were to use the culture argument his brother would have ownership of Tseliso's wife if he were to die. Cultural practices have been rejected in one area of life so where the cultural practice is no longer useful or right it should not be followed especially if it breaches human rights law which has been accepted as the law of the land.

Another speech that made a huge impact on me was a speech based on research done by Monica Verhofstadt from Belgium into the reasons given by people with mental health problems for applying to die. It was clear that each of these people had multiple reasons for wanting to die, not just one. They had many serious illnesses and had experienced terrible things in their lives. Access to the right to die relieved them of the pressure they felt to end their lives and gave them hope to continue living. This speech convinced me of the need for an Elective Death unit which addresses both physical and mental reasons for wishing to die.

Australian politicians argue along similar lines to the South African politicians when they give religious reasons for maintaining the law criminalizing a person who assists another to die. In the recent debate on the *Restoring the Territory Rights Bill* Senator Williams the New South Wales Nationals Whip in the Senate stated *I rise to speak on the Restoring Territory Rights (assisted Suicide Legislation) Bill 2015 and make it clear that, as I said to my parish priest, Father Joe, last Saturday week, I will not be supporting the bill.*

I am sure it is likely that Senator Williams has read the Pope's *Declaration on Euthanasia* which to support its argument draws on two thousand year old teachings of St Paul that say "If we live, we live to the Lord, and if we die, we die to the Lord" (Rom. 14:8 cf. Phil. 1:20). The Declaration states the following about euthanasia.

No one is permitted to ask for this act of killing, either for himself or herself or for another person entrusted to his or her care....nor can any authority legitimately recommend or permit such action.

If the senator is following instruction from the Catholic Church surely this raises a question about whether his allegiance is with the State of Rome or Australia. My analysis of the voting pattern on this bill (now on the website) indicates that the Coalition parties are committed for one reason or another to upholding the so-called 'traditional values' emanating from the church and currently being maintained by Australian Federal and State governments. These values in effect give the State permission to force us to die of disease and if we do not want to die in this way require us to hang, gas, shoot ourselves or break the law. And the worst part about this is that the law is constructed in such a way as to make death by disease seem 'natural' and hanging oneself seem 'inevitable'. As I said to the ACT End of Life Committee this is a form of capital punishment. I should have added 'for no crime other than being alive'.

When I first began to be involved with the dying with dignity movement I was reluctant to see religious ideas as providing the basic reason for opposition to changing the law. I took 'a live and let live' view and was not convinced that the religious argument was where the real opposition lay. Thirteen years of being involved in this movement has convinced me that the opposition does come from those who are religious and specifically those whose beliefs require them to impose their views about how we should die on

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everyone. Clearly this does not include the majority of religious people who like the rest of the population do not hold these missionary views.

In all these years I have never heard anyone argue that people should not be allowed to die according to their religious beliefs. If people think they belong to God and the State and believe that their suffering when they die of cancer will bring them to Jesus Christ that is a choice they may make even if the law changes. But I have been repeatedly made aware of the many ways in which religious people insist that the law must stay the way it is for all sorts of reasons that can be dealt with in ways other than maintaining the current law. And I have watched with alarm as they put pressure on politicians with lies and arguments about 'murder' of vulnerable people that as they see it will be the inevitable result of a change to the law.

I believe this is tyranny. Australians have consistently shown themselves to be opposed to tyranny. In the past in referenda they rejected conscription and the banning of the Communist Party and agreed to include indigenous Australians in the census. Recently in a postal vote they agreed that the law should change to allow people of the same sex to marry. Polls have consistently shown that Australians believe that it's time to end the suffering at the end of life. If a referendum were held it would clearly show our politicians that we believe that **The Suffering Must Stop**. Unfortunately how tyrannical modern governments are prepared to be and the degree of risk associated with helping others to die was made unexpectedly clear following the WFRtDS Conference when the WFRtDS President Sean Davison was arrested on a charge of murder. Please note the WFRtDS statement following this Bulletin.

We have worked all our lives and paid taxes to provide services that all Australians can access. It's time for Australians to be able to access within the Health system of each state or territory Elective Death units that support them to have peaceful deaths. These units would provide counselling services, staff especially trained to be with us and our families when we die, and medication that will bring about a peaceful, pain-free quick death at a time that suits us; not the ACT Legislative Assembly or any other government in Australia. I encourage you to read the DWDACT submission to the Legislative Assembly now on our website which spells out these ideas more fully.

In the meantime thank you for your involvement in the Dying with Dignity movement. It takes courage to part of a movement demanding change to the law. Most of us are law abiding and hope to live safely within the law. It's not wise to break the law because the consequences can be very severe; in the case of being found guilty of assisting someone to die a penalty of 10 years in the ACT but it could be more given Section 231A in the Self Government Act.

I hope to see you at 2.00 p.m. on Monday 15th of October.

Jeanne Arthur
President
DWDACT

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Please note the following statement that has been published on the WFRtDS website in support of Professor Sean Davison who is the President of the World Federation.

WFRtDS Statement regarding arrest of Sean Davison

25 September 2018

The World Federation of Right to Die Societies notes the recent arrest of its President Sean Davison on the charge of the murder of 43-year-old doctor Anrich Burger, who was left a quadriplegic after an accident in 2005. Anrich Burger's death occurred in 2013.

The facts of this matter will be determined by the courts in South Africa, nevertheless the World Federation of Right to Die Societies wishes it to be known that it commends those who support others who wish to have a peaceful death of their choosing. Its members are striving across the globe to make it possible for this to happen through regulation by the law.

The WFRtDS strongly condemns governments that continue to deny human beings ownership of their own bodies and control over their deaths by maintaining law that criminalizes those who assist others to die peacefully.

The World Federation believes that governments across the world are assuming control of what is not their right to control, our bodies, and denying human beings the right to a peaceful death free of suffering at a time of their choice.

The WFRtDS wishes to express its admiration for Professor Davison's courage and sincere engagement with those who are suffering at the end of life despite the ongoing persecution he has experienced by governments who maintain outdated, cruel law that forces its citizens to die of disease and to hang, gas or shoot themselves if they do not want that so-called 'choice'.

The WFRtDS calls on all governments 1) to repeal the law that criminalizes those who assist people who wish to die peacefully and 2) to provide proper regulation of death within their health systems based on universally accepted human rights law.

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