



NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

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NEWSLETTER

August 1999

In a landmark decision the national peak body 'Palliative Care Australia' has adopted a policy on euthanasia.

There can be no more credible voice on palliative care and in publicly stating that complete relief of suffering is not always possible and that some people rationally and consistently request deliberate ending of life, Palliative Care Australia put to rest the claim that with optimal palliative care there is no demand for laws permitting voluntary euthanasia.

Palliative Care Australia representing all States and Territories is to be commended for their honest and realistic approach to this sensitive issue.

Hopefully other professional medical organisations like the AMA and Nurses Federations will follow the lead shown by PCA and adopt policy in tune with the facts and community expectations.

**Palliative Care Australia's
'Position Statement on Euthanasia'
is printed in full on the next page.**

ALP Moves on V.E.

Another unusual but welcome policy decision was taken by the ALP Queensland State Conference recently.

A resolution 'Labor believes that voluntary euthanasia should be available as a legal treatment option for a person of sound mind suffering from a terminal illness which has diminished their quality of life to the extent that the person requests termination of their life' was passed and has therefore become the Party's policy.

Although the adoption of policy does not mean the ALP Government will introduce legislation it is a huge step forward in our fight to allow voluntary euthanasia.

Whilst the V.E. movement will not support any political party, we encourage discussion and adoption of policy on voluntary euthanasia and look forward to the day when all political parties reflect community attitudes in their platform.

It was not long ago that no political party wanted to debate policy on abortion, today no political party could avoid having such policy. The issue of voluntary euthanasia is on the same path.

Position Statement on Euthanasia

At a National Council Meeting held in Hobart on 19-20 March 1999 the following statement on euthanasia was released.

Palliative Care Australia:

States that palliative care practice does not include deliberate ending of life, even if this is requested by the patient;

Defines palliative care as a concept of care that provides coordinated nursing, medical and allied services for people who are facing a life-limiting illness. This care is delivered, where possible, in the environment of that person's choice. This care provides physical, psychological, social, emotional and spiritual support for patients and families and their friends. The scope of palliative care services includes grief and bereavement support for the patient and family and other carers during the life of the patient and after the patient's death;

Believes that all palliative care services should be available to everyone in need of such services and that adequate funding for quality palliative care services should be provided;

Believes that dying is a natural process and that declining or withdrawing futile treatment is acceptable;

Acknowledges that while pain and other symptoms can be helped, complete relief of suffering is not always possible, even with optimal palliative care;

Recognises and respects the fact that some people rationally and consistently request deliberate ending of life;

Recognises that there is a wide divergence of views about euthanasia in Australian society, and also within the caring professions including the palliative care service community; and

Welcomes open and frank discussion within the community and within the health professions about all aspects of death and dying.

Footnote - Highlight by Editor

New MLAs Supportive

During the leadup to the recent by-elections for the Legislative Assembly seats of Blain and Wanguri the NTVES sought the views of candidates for the ALP and CLP.

As all four candidates indicated they were supportive of voluntary euthanasia or prepared

to represent the wishes of a majority of their constituents, it was not necessary to become involved in the campaign.

In elections where there are candidates who are not prepared to represent their constituents this Society will advertise that fact during the campaign.

The Dutch Take Action

The Dutch Government has recommended legislation to take its liberal voluntary euthanasia policy out of a legal grey area.

Bowing to pressure from doctors and euthanasia advocates, the Government plans to formally decriminalise voluntary euthanasia and assisted suicide on the condition it is carried out within strict guidelines.

Those guidelines stipulate that patients must suffer unbearably and must request death repeatedly and lucidly. Doctors must also seek a second opinion and report all euthanasia deaths to authorities.

While the practice was tolerated in the past, it remained officially illegal even if guidelines were followed. Doctors claimed it left them in a legal limbo.

The new legislation has to be approved by both Chambers of the Dutch Parliament, a process expected to take up to a year.

and explain.....

No doubt stung by the continuous barrage of misrepresentation worldwide by opponents to voluntary euthanasia, the Dutch Government has published a comprehensive booklet, which explains their policy and the V.E. situation in their country. The booklet is available in several languages upon request from the Dutch Embassy. It is also available on the Internet at http://www.bz.minbuza.nl/english/c_sumpolicy.html

Hawaii to consider assisted suicide

Recommendations made by a Hawaiian state panel on death and dignity are to be introduced into the House of Representatives.

The panel made a number of unanimous recommendations, including more widely available hospice care, greater emphasis on effective pain control and keeping involuntary euthanasia illegal.

These are being supported by the House. However, a majority of the eighteen strong panel also recommended the legalisation of doctor assisted suicide and voluntary euthanasia.

This proposal has met with opposition from pro-life and medical groups, although the Governor of Hawaii, Ben Cayateno, has vowed to introduce such a bill for consideration.

A Bill in California

A law proposing to legalise physician-assisted suicide in California has been narrowly approved by the Assembly Appropriations Committee by a vote of 11 to 9. This means that the bill can move forward towards a time when it could be discussed by the Assembly and then by the Senate. However, Assemblywoman Dion Aroner has said that she will delay further action on the bill until the senate is more supportive of such a measure. She commented; "It's real clear the public is further ahead than the Legislature on this issue."

The bill has already been approved by the Judiciary Committee in the Assembly.

In 1992, Californian voters rejected a proposed law that would have legalised voluntary euthanasia by the tiniest margin 49% to 51%, however an opinion poll carried out in March of 1,500 Californians found that more than 70% supported doctor assisted suicide. One interesting finding was that Roman Catholic support has risen from 61% two years ago to 68% today.

Support Is Strong

The Dutch people overwhelmingly support how their system works. A survey carried out by the Erasmus University of Rotterdam in 1998, found that 92% of the Dutch population support voluntary euthanasia. More remarkably, considering the religious arguments raised against euthanasia, 82% of Christian Democrats and 96% of Roman Catholics favoured V.E.

even the religious

Many of the faith support assisted dying because of their religious beliefs. To them, helping a person to die can be an expression of Christian compassion and the love and support that Christians offer those in need.

'I sincerely believe that those who come after us will wonder why on earth we kept a human being alive against his will, when all the dignity, beauty and meaning of life had vanished; when any gain to anyone was clearly impossible, and when we should have been punished by the State if we had kept alive an animal in similar conditions'.

The late Rev. Dr. Leslie Weatherhead, a Methodist.



NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Membership

If you would like to become a member of the NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society please forward a \$15.00 cheque made payable to NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society
PO Box 2734
Darwin NT 0801

Changes to the NTVES Constitution

NTVES Objectives

At the Northern Territory Voluntary Euthanasia Society Annual General Meeting held 31 July 1999, changes were made to the Constitution. NTVES Objectives now read -

NTVES Objectives

Promote a knowledge and understanding of the *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act*, the *Natural Death Act* and other related legislation to the members and general community.

To influence public and political opinion in preparation for the time when the Northern Territory Parliament regains the constitutional authority to process responsible voluntary euthanasia legislation.

To promote palliative care services in the NT to ensure Voluntary Euthanasia is not sought due to inadequate palliation.

To promote the adoption of progressive legislation on consent to medical treatment and medical power of attorney.

Cooperate with other associations with compatible objectives.

Develop and maintain a relationship with the NT Government and other related interested parties/groups which enables the Society to provide effective and timely input to legislation and regulatory processes and policy development.