



NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

GPO Box 2734 Darwin NT 0801
Phone: 8945 1446

Patron: Mr Marshall Perron
President: Mrs Judy Dent

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Newsletter

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YourLastRight.com

On 6 October 2010, YourLastRight.com was launched in Melbourne in the run-up to the World Federation of Right to Die Societies conference. YourLastRight.com is an alliance of all the Dying with Dignity and Voluntary Euthanasia Societies in Australia, made possible by a grant from the Estate of Clem Jones OA and donations from each society. The aim of the alliance is to have physician assisted dying legislation passed in an Australian jurisdiction. Such legislation did exist in the Northern Territory until it was overturned by Kevin Andrews' bill; the territories can no longer enact VE legislation. The first goal of YourLastRight.com is the passage of Senator Bob Brown's Bill to restore territory rights to enact any legislation. Please tell your Federal Members of Parliament that you support Bob Brown's Bill. Please go to YourLastRight.com and sign up for the online rally. Ask your friends to sign up too. It is obvious from polls that many more people support VE legislation than ever join a VE group. Tell your local member that you want VE legislation. Don't let the politicians think VE is low-priority and unimportant.

YourLastRight.com had planned to launch with a TV commercial. Unfortunately, Commercials Advice (CAD) at the self-regulatory body of Free TV Australia decided the commercial was not acceptable and banned it. You can see it at YourLastRight.com and decide for yourself if it is acceptable or not. If you object to the banning of this commercial, go to www.freetv.com.au, click on Free TV contacts and send a message to cad@freetv.com.au

NT News Reader Survey

More than 85% of the nearly 1000 respondents to the *NT News* Reader Issues Survey said the *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act (ROTI)* should be reinstated. Support was evenly spread across the age groups. Greens leader Bob Brown plans to use the new rules extracted from Labor in forming a minority government to bring his private member's Bill back before Federal Parliament again. His new Bill is designed to restore the territories' rights to make euthanasia laws. It would not reinstate *ROTI*; Territory politicians would have to enact a new law. Given the current make-up of the NT Legislative Assembly, it is not very likely that such a law would be suggested, let alone passed. Most of the NT politicians are very coy about their position on this issue. If/when Senator Brown's Bill is passed, will there be a Territory representative brave enough to emulate Marshall Perron and table a private member's bill to reinstate *ROTI*? The release of the poll result has opened up the discussion on voluntary euthanasia with an article and/or letters and texts to the Editor appearing every day for the past month. Don't let the discussion die. Keep sending letters and texts to the newspaper.

WA Bill

Robin Chapple's private member's bill to have voluntary euthanasia in Western Australia was defeated 24 to 11 (23 September 2010), prompting the Australian Christian Lobby to say, "Last night's resounding defeat of a bill to legalise euthanasia in Western Australia by 24 votes to 11 marks the fourth time a fully-constituted State parliament has carefully considered and then thrown out a euthanasia bill in the last two years." They state it is time to stop pursuing euthanasia 'ideology of death'. We disagree; this subject is not going to go away. Legislation allowing physician assisted dying must be passed in Australia.

WORLD FEDERATION OF RIGHT TO DIE SOCIETIES 18th BIENNIAL CONFERENCE

The conference was held in Melbourne on the 7th, 8th and 9th of October 2010. The following reports come from American delegates Richard Cote (Day 1 and 2) and Faye Girsh (Day 3).

Day 1

What may be the best-organized WFRTDS conference in many years started with a tantalizing welcome today by Dying with Dignity-Victoria president/conference chair Neil Francis. He promised the delegates from 46 organisations in 27 countries a major media advocacy announcement to follow. The morning program featured a wealth of lectures offering practical and savvy advice on how to manage the push for legislative change, as two Australian States have or will soon have active bills before their respective parliaments.

An unprecedented "armchair talk" between Neil Francis and senior representatives of Palliative Care Australia and the Australian Medical Association, designed to encourage the latter two to adopt a studied neutral position on voluntary euthanasia, led to an amazingly fresh, open, and candid discussion. At the end of the session, the PCA and AMA representatives got a rousing round of applause for their openness to a meaningful dialogue and their candour with the right to die movement in Australia.

The big news of the day was the launch of a pan-Australian pro-euthanasia advocacy umbrella. A cooperative effort of all the nation's state and territorial VE groups just launched a sophisticated national advocacy website: www.yourlastright.com, which will be followed by intense courting of the media and speakers actively working nationwide for the enactment of VE laws.

The warm, friendly, and witty Australians left no stone unturned to make all the delegates feel as though each was not just a visitor but a family member.

Day 2

Dr Michael Irwin's address on framing the right to choose voluntary euthanasia by those not experiencing severe pain or illness was informative and thought-provoking. He explored the "tired-of-life" or "completed life agenda" concept brought so vividly to life in the film, *Mademoiselle and the Doctor*.

The film showed in no uncertain terms how a rational, highly intelligent woman had made the

unshakable decision not to reach her 80th birthday. Entirely comfortable with her decision, and despite endless counselling by Dr. Philip Nitschke to consider other options, she chose self-deliverance a few days before that date.

Irwin's talk also described the rapid progress of his newly-formed group, *Society for Old Age Rational Suicide (SOARS)* in the UK, and the Netherlands, and their interaction with the Swiss.

The second session explored the complex differences between the laws of various Western countries, and how they affect the methods that can be used to make those of each country more humane, open, and transparent. Dr. Richard MacDonald gave a very lucid account of the inherent challenges faced by those trying to assist dementia sufferers, particularly the safeguards required to assure that wishes made while fully competent and in the early stages of decline would later be honoured.

Russel Ogden described the intense and often bizarre challenges which face him as an academic criminologist who is making an unprecedented and intense study of assisted suicide through legal, scholarly direct observation.

And finally, the extent to which the typical and unavoidable differences of opinion between various states and territories CAN be bridged has been demonstrated by the unanimous approval of the collaborative pact described at www.yourlastright.com.

Australia may prove to be the world model for how the intellectually fragmented right to die movement can vastly increase the likelihood of achieving their single goal: a gentle, humane, self-elected end to lives filled with catastrophic, untreatable pain for those who are terminally ill.

Day 3

The World Federation meetings ended today after a series of 20 excellent presentations covering a wide variety of topics. Two sessions were devoted to VRRF (Voluntary Refusal of food and Hydration) both for competent and non-competent persons. Nan Maitland described four cases of people using this method who struggled with much discomfort and anguish causing one of them to give up. Liz Nicols had previously described the very difficult death of her father using this method.

Stan Terman and Tijn Hagens told the audience how this method can be made better with proper medication, nursing care, oral hygiene and medication.

Philosopher Helga Kuhse criticized the hypocrisy of not calling the medical help required assistance in dying when the patient's intent is to die and the doctor knows the outcome. Barrister Ian Freckelton described the complex legal issues about VRRF and palliative care in Victoria.

For non-competent patients who would want to insure that they would not be fed, Dr. Terman went into detail about his My Way Cards and ensuing document. Ans Baars described the advance directive developed by NVVE (the Netherlands Association) enabling physician assisted dying for early stage dementia. Euthanasia is not available for these people or for incompetent dementia patients even with an advance directive.

There were papers on evaluating depression and a scale presented by psychologist Sarah Edelman, though there was some reluctance to involve people requesting assistance in dying in complex psychiatric assessments. Richard MacDonald and others stated that they had not

worked with anyone who chose to end their life because of depression. Others pointed out that depression often lifted when people knew there was a peaceful and certain way out of their suffering.

The late afternoon session was more political, dealing with "quasi legal support in dying." Michael Irwin, who had charges against him recently dropped, gave the history of political dissent and civil disobedience, citing Ghandi, Martin Luther King, even Jesus Christ. The statement calling for a World Federation Code of Ethics presented by Dying in Dignity UK was read stating their objection to actions outside of the law.

Ted Goodwin outlined the procedures used by the Final Exit Network and challenging the law to say their procedures were not legal. He is under indictment for a case in Georgia and hopes that it will test the issue. Richard MacDonald affirmed that the actions of the Network are within the law and both affirmed the need to challenge unjust laws.

Russel Ogden presented a revealing slide presentation on The Realities of Helium showing a person actually dying from the use of the gas in a very short time with no adverse symptoms. Rodney Syme described the various means of medical assistance that can be provided and encouraged the World Federation to support those members who were challenging the law.

The final business of the day was the election of the World Federation board. Ted Goodwin is now President. Faye Girsh is Vice-President and will continue as Newsletter Editor. Libby Drake is Secretary and Michael Irwin will continue as Treasurer. The contested positions were the three at-large posts which will now be held by Cynthia St John (Canada), Aycke Smook (Netherlands) and Rodney Syme (Australia).

NTVES Annual General Meeting

The NTVES AGM was held on 7 August 2010 and the following office bearers were elected unopposed:

<i>President</i>	J Dent
<i>Vice-President</i>	V Czernezkyj
<i>Secretary</i>	E A Mason
<i>Treasurer</i>	S McKerrow
<i>Public Officer</i>	S McKerrow

The next AGM will be on 6 August 2011.

NTVES appreciates being able to use the facilities of COTA(NT) and Darwin Senior Citizens at Spillett House to print this newsletter.