



NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

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Newsletter

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News from Oregon

Life-ending peaceful drugs cost up to \$20,000

Terminally ill patients wanting a peaceful death in Oregon and Washington are being charged between \$3,000 and \$20,000 a time for the barbiturate lethal drugs which doctors are permitted to prescribe under the Death With Dignity Acts. Health insurance companies are refusing to pay these exorbitant sums, leaving most patients unable to relieve their suffering.

The long-established superior drug for doctor-hastened death, Nembutal (sodium pentobarbital) has rocketed to prices upwards of \$20,000 in America. The next most widely used drug for this purpose is Seconal (secobarbital) for which manufacturers and pharmacies are charging patients \$3,000 and sometimes more.

In European countries where assisted suicide is allowed, the price for a lethal dose remains at between \$400 and \$500.

The lethal dosage prescribed for both drugs is usually nine grams, taken orally. In the last century these two drugs were commonly prescribed as sleep aids but became notorious for suicide. Today Nembutal and Seconal are almost never prescribed except for lawful assisted dying because gentler sleep aids developed.

Bruce Endicott of Eugene, Oregon described his dilemma: "I'm 67 years old, have had seven spinal fusions so I have major chronic pain for which I take large amounts of opiates. I also have advanced emphysema which qualifies me for the assisted suicide procedure. The prescription is awaiting me at a local pharmacy, but the price tag reads \$3,068.81. This entire process has been beyond aggravating, it's driving me mad."

"The excessive pricing seems to be for two factors," said Derek Humphry, author of the bestselling how-to-die book "Final Exit", and founder of the Hemlock Society. "These drugs are now only manufactured in Switzerland and India with the patents recently changing hands at high prices. They are labelled "boutique drugs". Secondly, there is a reluctance in Europe to sell these lethal drugs in America because they can be used for judicial executions which are deplored over there."

Doctors in the North West USA sympathetic to assisted dying under the law are prescribing Seconal as the cheaper drug but in many cases the patients leave the script at the pharmacy as they unable to meet the cost.

So doctors have devised a different lethal cocktail, the recipe for which they have released to Mr. Humphry. It can only be concocted by a licensed physician and requires skilled preparation. So far this year it has been used in 36 cases of people wishing to die under Death With Dignity Acts in both states .

After drinking the mixture (injection is unlawful) the average patient goes into a coma within five minutes and death occurs with 12 to 20 minutes.

UPDATE

After the story became known of terminally ill patient Bruce Endicott being charged \$3,068 for a doctor's prescription for one hundred 25mg Seconal tablets, his medical insurer met the full charge and Mr. Endicott now has his prescription. If and when he chooses to end his life under the Death With Dignity Act is henceforth in his hands.

News from California

In a historic step forward, the California Senate passed the End of Life Option Act by a vote of 23 to 14 yesterday, Friday, 11 September 2015. Legislative approval of this groundbreaking bill is now complete, and next it goes to Governor Jerry Brown for signature. All efforts now turn to urging Governor Brown to sign the bill, or at least not to veto it.

"Passing this historic bill is a monumental victory for terminally ill Californians," said Compassion & Choices President Barbara Coombs Lee. "We are optimistic Governor Brown will sign this law because he is a compassionate person who understands Californians in agony cannot wait another year."

This is a tremendous victory, since California often leads the nation. It's one of America's largest, most populous, most diverse and most advanced states. Once Governor Brown signs the bill, the right of terminally ill people to aid-in-dying will be established in five states – Oregon, Washington, Vermont, Montana and now California.

News from Canada

CTV news in Toronto reported 21 September 2015:

Panel looking at assisted dying learns much from European experience

By Sheryl Ubelacker, The Canadian Press

TORONTO -- The head of a panel looking into legislative options to govern doctor-assisted death says a recent fact-finding tour in Europe has opened members eyes to the many complexities surrounding a practice that's soon to become legal in Canada.

Dr. Harvey Max Chochinov said he and the two other members of the External Panel recently returned from an intensive 11-day study of how physician-aided dying has been implemented in the Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland, where patients can legally have their deaths hastened.

"We learned a tremendous amount from experts who have a great deal of experience with end-of-life regimes in their countries," said Chochinov, Canada Research Chair in Palliative Care at the University of Manitoba.

"We saw people from such diverse perspectives -- people who still continue to struggle with the issue of physician-hastened dying and are very much opposed to it," he said Monday from Winnipeg.

"And we saw others who were, of course, much more comfortable and described this as something that has become part of their cultural experience around death and dying."

Chochinov, Ryerson professor emerita Catherine Frazee and University of Ottawa law professor Benoit

Pelletier were appointed to the panel by the Harper government in July, following the Supreme Court of Canada's February decision to overturn the ban on doctor-assisted suicide and euthanasia.

The high court ruled that Canadians with unbearable and irremediable suffering could be eligible to end their lives with a doctor's aid, but the justices stayed their decision until February 2016 to give Parliament time to replace the existing law if it so chooses.

The panel was appointed to consult experts and the Canadian public before providing the government with potential options for crafting new legislation, but their work, for the most part, is on hold until the federal election is decided Oct. 19.

Chochinov, Frazee and Pelletier met with a broad range of experts in the three European countries, including general-medicine and palliative-care physicians, lawyers, government officials and bio-ethicists.

The panel also consulted with two major groups offering assisted-dying services in Switzerland: Dignitas, a group that helps people -- including foreigners -- with a terminal illness or severe physical and mental illnesses to die; and EXIT, an aid-in-dying organization that helps people plan for the end of life with the best available information and the support of family and friends.

"We really tried to get a sense from them as to ... what is the connection, for example, between these death-hastening organizations and medical practitioners," said Chochinov.

The panel wanted to know how people with abject suffering who seek help in dying are referred to services and whether people can self-refer, he said, adding that members also wanted to determine the role of right-to-die organizations and doctors in assessing whether patients meet the criteria for assisted death.

"I think we learned there is a very close relationship between the role of physician and the role of organizations such as Dignitas and EXIT, and it really is that connection between those two that seems to facilitate the ability in Switzerland and to deliver physician-assisted dying. I don't think I understood the complexities of that as well before as I do now after visiting Switzerland."

Chochinov said the challenge for the panel is to lay out options for regulations that honour the values inherent in Canada's health-care system, which approaches suffering "with compassion, integrity and wisdom."

"One thing that's critically important -- we very much need Canadians to weigh in and to provide us their guidance on the issue of physician-hastened dying and how that can be enacted in Canada in a way that is going to be in keeping with those core values in health care."

The public is encouraged to provide their insights on the website:www.externalpanel.ca.

"That's what our panel is looking for," he said. "We are open to any and all opinions that will guide our work."

News from the UK

The Daily Mirror in London reported 24 September 2015:

Labour Party new shadow Health Secretary backs right to die for the terminally ill. Heidi Alexander says it is "appalling" only the rich have the option of assisted suicide abroad. Terminally-ill Brits should have the right to choose to die in the UK, the Labour shadow Health Secretary has said. A new law to give those with just months to live the right to die was rejected by MPs earlier this month .

But in the first newspaper interview in her new role, Heidi Alexander branded it appalling that some Brits are currently denied the option of assisted suicide abroad because they cannot afford to travel. Assisted suicide is legal in some countries, which include Switzerland.

Alexander, the daughter of an electrician, said: "I believe that people should have choice at the end of their life. I think it's appalling that if you want to control the time and manner of your own death when you have a terminal illness, you have to be rich enough to be able to afford to travel to Dignitas in Switzerland."

World Federation of Right to Die Societies Biennial Conference May 2016

It is with great pleasure that NVVE announce the international conference:

Euthanasia 2016.

NVVE is proud to organise this conference in cooperation with the World Federation of Right to Die Societies.

In a world with a growing demand for legalised euthanasia and physician assisted dying, this conference intends to inform and inspire a wide range of professionals involved in end-of-life choices. The conference will offer physicians, lawyers, politicians, policymakers, campaigners and activists an opportunity to broaden, deepen and share their knowledge and experience. The NVVE strives to contribute to make dying-in-dignity a legal option in more countries. About 1000 delegates are expected at the conference which will be held in Amsterdam.

On line registration is now open.

NTVES ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

The NTVES AGM was held on 8 August 2015 and the following office bearers were elected unopposed:

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

The next AGM will be in August 2016 (date to be confirmed).

Membership renewal forms are included for those members whose renewals have not yet been received. If you believe our records are incorrect, please call Judy on 8945 1446.