



# NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

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## **From our Patron Marshall Perron**

Those of us who have been pushing to get Dying With Dignity back on the political agenda in the 19 years since the NT Rights of the Terminally Ill Act was overturned are heartened by the current level of activity in Australia.

Thanks to the relentless and untiring efforts of the South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society, top of the list is the Voluntary Euthanasia Bill 2016 currently before the SA Parliament.

The private members bill was sponsored by an ALP member, Steph Keys with the strong support of a Liberal, Duncan McFetridge. Even better, the SA Premier and the Leader of the Opposition have expressed their support. I have long believed that no State will pass Right to Die legislation unless it has the backing of the Premier. SA has previously led social reform in Australia and we hope they do it again with this Bill. Unfortunately there is very little time allocated to debating private members bills in the SA Parliament so it will be some months before the Bill is voted upon.

Eligibility under this Bill is not limited to the terminally ill; the terminology used is 'unbearable and hopeless suffering'. This broad definition is aimed at allowing people with a range of conditions that compel them to live with unbearable suffering, to seek assistance to die.

Next there is the Victorian Parliamentary inquiry into End of Life Issues. This committee received over 1000 submissions. Some of them present the most powerful arguments in support of our cause that I have ever seen. Members of the committee will visit Europe and the USA and Canada to see for themselves how their Right to Die laws are working. This is the first time Australian politicians have undertaken such a trip and it should put to rest the fallacious claims peddled by our opponents that all of those regimes are disasters.

Former Premier of Tasmania Lara Giddings has foreshadowed introducing a new Voluntary Assisted Dying Bill in June. The last time a bill was put to the vote in Tasmania it failed by just two votes and the local Dying With Dignity organisation has been active in the meantime trying to persuade 'swinging' members of parliament to support the cause.

Feast or famine, the Federal Parliament has before it two private members bills to repeal the Andrews Act and restore powers to the Territories to consider voluntary euthanasia legislation.

Senators David Leyonhjelm and Richard DiNatale have each acted independently and introduced Bills that, despite different terminology, do exactly the same thing. It is extremely disappointing that these people refuse to liaise on the subject and join forces to maximise the chances of success. At least we have NT Senator Nova Peris and ACT Senator Katy Gallagher joining up to support either of the Bills that is brought on for debate.

As it appears there will be an early Federal election this year it is likely both Bills will lapse and have to be reintroduced during the term of the new parliament.

There is nothing like a new articulate advocate bursting on to the scene to give the profile of our cause a lift and Andrew Denton has certainly done that. Having spent a year delving into the issue including visits to Europe and the USA interviewing participants, Andrew launched his case for law reform with a brilliant presentation in Melbourne last October. Since then his message has been carried nationally on TV, newspapers, magazines and Radio. His podcasts, available on <http://www.wheelercentre.com/broadcasts/podcasts/better-off-dead> are a unique new way to present the case for social reform.

With all that's happening in Australia plus California and Canada in the process of adopting Dying with Dignity laws this year on top of those that already have it, it is hard not to be convinced there is momentum building that will lead to the first Australian state legalising voluntary euthanasia. There is a band of MPs in every state parliament who support our cause; they just don't add up to the 51% we need.

But we are getting there.

## **Restoring Territory Rights**

The Restoring Territory Rights (Dying with Dignity) Bill 2015, presented to the Senate on 1 March 2016, was drafted as a bipartisan approach to make it legal for the NT to pass right to die legislation. This right was taken away by the Howard government in 1997 after the NT became the first Australian jurisdiction to legalise euthanasia.

THE Northern Territory's chief minister says he's keen for the NT to once again be able to introduce laws to legalise voluntary euthanasia. Chief Minister Adam Giles says the NT should be able to create its own legislation. "If that allowance was made I'd be very happy and very keen to see euthanasia brought back to the NT," he told reporters.

Opposition Leader Michael Gunner says the matter is one of territory rights, and if his party wins the August 27 election he would hold a conscience vote on the matter. "I'd be very happy to have a formal consultation process to make sure a very sensitive issue is handled well in the community," he said.

Senator Nova Peris said she hoped the bill would have widespread support in the chamber.

"While not afforded the same legislative rights in the constitution, the NT should be able to make substantial social decisions without the interference of Canberra politicians," she said, adding that the bill wouldn't compel the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia, but would give the NT and the ACT the ability to do so if they chose.

## Pharmaceutical Company Hiked Price on Aid in Dying Drug

By Katie Orr, March 22, 2016, KQED News

When California's aid-in-dying law takes effect this June, terminally ill patients who decide to end their lives could be faced with a hefty bill for the lethal medication. It retails for more than \$3,000. Valeant Pharmaceuticals, the company that makes the drug most commonly used in physician-assisted suicide, doubled the drug's price last year, one month after California lawmakers proposed legalizing the practice.

"It's just pharmaceutical company greed," said David Grube, a family doctor in Oregon, where physician-assisted death has been legal for 20 years.

The drug is Seconal, or secobarbital, its generic name. Originally developed in the 1930s as a sleeping pill, it fell out of favor when people died from taking too much, or from taking it in combination with alcohol. But when intended as a lethal medication to hasten the death of someone suffering from a terminal disease, Seconal is the drug of choice.

"It works very quickly and very gently," Grube says. "People fall asleep with no complications. It's a very gentle passing." In 2009, Grube remembers the price of a lethal dose of Seconal (100 capsules) was less than \$200. Over the next six years, it shot up to \$1,500. Then Valeant bought Seconal last February and immediately doubled the price to \$3,000.

Most drug companies justify such hikes by pointing to high research costs. But Grube says that's not the case with Seconal. It's been around for 80 years. "It's not a complicated thing to make, there's no research being done on it, there's no development," he says. "That to me is unconscionable."

Valeant bought several other drugs at the same time it bought Seconal, raising some of those prices as much as 500 percent. That sparked a congressional investigation into its pricing practices. (The CEO resigned Monday amid an accounting controversy).

“Valeant sets prices for drugs based on a number of factors,” the company said in a statement, “including the cost of developing or acquiring the drug, the availability of generics and the benefits of the drug compared with costly alternative treatments. When possible, we offer patient assistance programs to mitigate the effects of price adjustments and keep out-of-pocket costs affordable for patients.”

Under the California aid-in-dying law, it is optional for health insurance companies to cover the costs of the practice. Most private insurers plan to do so, according to the California Association of Health Plans. So does the state’s Medicaid program.

But for patients who aren’t covered, there is a cheaper alternative: a three-part drug cocktail that can be mixed by a compounding pharmacy for about \$400.

Grube says the cocktail works just as well, but doctors usually don’t prescribe it because of the hassle some patients have to go through to get it. Seconal, on the other hand, is a ready-made pill, routinely available at most retail drugstores.

He says advocacy groups like Compassion & Choices are working on campaigns to reduce drug costs and to educate doctors and patients about the law.

“My dream is that any Californian who will choose aid in dying would have few burdens or barriers to jump through,” Grube said.

## **NTVES AGM**

**The AGM will be held on 20 August 2016**

Please mark the date on your calendar and plan to attend.

A form is enclosed for membership renewal where required.