

THE BULLETIN

ISSN 1321-0599

NEWSLETTER OF THE SOUTH AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA SOCIETY INC. (SAVES)

Vol 25 No 1. 'No price is too great for the privilege of owning yourself' **March 2008**

Rudyard Kipling

Doctors 'sailing close to the wind'

Melbourne urologist and past president of *Dying with Dignity Victoria*, Dr Rodney Syme, has been featured in an article entitled 'Terminal Answer' in the national weekly magazine *The Bulletin* (1). This article discusses Dr Syme's advocacy on behalf of people suffering intolerably at the end of life. A long time activist for law reform to allow greater choice at the end of life, Dr Syme exemplifies the compassionate doctor; offering incurably ill people guidance and expertise despite great personal risk. In the article Dr Syme stated:

[I have] sailed close to the wind, no doubt about it, [because] the law is hypocritical, and I'm not the only doctor who is operating in this murky terrain. It's just that I'm prepared to say so publicly. (2)

Two Australian doctors have been charged and acquitted in the past for allegedly assisting patients to die; Western Australian urologist Dr Daryl Stephens (2000) and Sydney doctor Andrew Hollo (2004).

This latest media attention again exposes the vulnerability of doctors who assist patients to end their lives when facing a distressing and/or protracted dying process. In this 'murky terrain' compassionate practitioners necessarily stand alone, without the support of the Australian Medical Association (AMA) or the law. Earlier editions of *The VE Bulletin* have discussed a range of challenges to the AMA's oppositional stance. One of these is the united front of 'Doctors for AMA Neutrality on Voluntary Euthanasia', an advocacy group which has 65 signatories nationwide to date. Such challenges to the status quo are in recognition of, and concern over, the horrific ways in which some people are forced to die, despite the best medical

care. Yet AMA president, Dr Rosa Capolingua, dismisses these concerns, arguing that most people receive good end-of-life care, and that the AMA therefore opposes any law change (3).

Bulletin inserts this edition....

This edition of the *VE Bulletin* contains four inserts. Two are petitions for signatures in support of legislative reform in **state** parliament. One is for the SA Legislative Council and the other for the SA House of Assembly. SAVES is hopeful that members can collect as many signatures as possible. Signatories should sign both petitions to cover both houses of parliament. These petitions should be returned to SAVES (PO Box 2151 Kent Town 5071) well in time for twice yearly presentation to parliament in June and October. Blank forms may be photocopied in anticipation of collecting more than one page of signatures. Copies may not be made of completed or partly completed petitions. The more signatures the better but even a few from each member will be greatly appreciated.

The third insert is a call for members to write in support of Senator Bob Brown's *Rights of the Terminally Ill* Bill 2008 in **federal** parliament. This legislation seeks to repeal the 'Andrews Bill' which overturned the Northern Territory voluntary euthanasia legislation.

The fourth insert is a new wallet card.

Inside:

| | |
|--|-----|
| President's Report..... | 3 |
| Thank you notices..... | 5 |
| A personal reflection- Dr Rosie Jones..... | 5 |
| A member writes..... | 5 |
| Chaplain's compassionate advocacy..... | 6 |
| International news and journals..... | 8-9 |
| Wallet card review..... | 9 |
| SAVES media release federal election..... | 10 |
| AGM information and membership form..... | 11 |
| SAVES primary objective and committee..... | 12 |

This of course ignores the plight of the minority who are unable to have their suffering relieved except in death.

Doctors who put their patients first in such instances are therefore forced to give advice and assistance under circumstances that leave them legally vulnerable. In her book *Voluntary Euthanasia and the Common Law* (4) Margaret Otłowski points out the blatant hypocrisy of opponents who support the legal status quo. This is because the status quo effectively acknowledges that doctors *do* administer voluntary euthanasia often without criminal charge, but still remain at legal risk even in this quite common ‘turning of the blind eye’.

Doctors are also vulnerable too to the need to constantly defend their internal mental states or ‘intentions’, in convincing others and possibly even themselves, that a particular intervention is made with the intention of ‘relieving suffering’ rather than ‘hastening death’.

As Dr Helga Kuhse of Monash University argued in a submission to the British *Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill* Bill:

Faced with a possible charge of murder, doctors act in secret, without professional consultation. Thus, rather than encourage honesty and openness in the doctor/patient relationship, it encourages self-deception, hypocrisy, and secrecy and seems to lead doctors to act without their patients’ consent. (5)

This can only be detrimental to patient and doctor alike.

While not openly advocating legalization of voluntary euthanasia, Dr Roger Magnusson (Faculty of Law University of Sydney) makes the important point that ‘the key to the euthanasia debate lies in how best to regulate what doctors do’, and that opponents [of choice for voluntary euthanasia] need to have ‘an honest appreciation of what doctors do, and the risks and harms of euthanasia when it is practiced in secret’ (6).

Surveys of Australian doctors’ attitudes and practices show that one third of respondents

claim they have practiced voluntary euthanasia at least once, even though it is unlawful. Federal opposition leader, Dr Brendan Nelson, is one such doctor, and has been quoted as saying that he regards voluntary euthanasia as justified under some circumstances. He stated that he has administered a treatment specifically to end a patient’s life (7). However, Dr Nelson does not support the law being changed to legalise a practice that he is obviously prepared to undertake in the belief that it is both a compassionate and ethical action.

In contrast to the view that it is acceptable to leave all this in the ‘murky terrain’, in 1995 Dr Syme was one of seven doctors who publicly admitted that they had practiced voluntary euthanasia via an open letter to the then Premier, Jeff Kennett (8). This group of doctors became known as the ‘Melbourne Seven’. Their letter included details of when the actions had occurred, and at the same time advocated for legal reform. Dr Syme told a press conference that the Australian Medical Association and the legal system were both hypocritical in outlawing euthanasia, arguing:

It is not a question of whether euthanasia should be practised--it is already--but of how to change the law and ensure adequate safeguards.

Dr Syme was also one of ten medical practitioners who were international signatories to ‘The Melbourne Declaration’, publicly declaring their support for choice in dying during the 11th International Conference of the *World Federation of Right to Die Societies* held in Melbourne in October 1996. He was also a signatory to ‘The Boston Declaration’ made during the 2000 World Federation Conference. On this occasion a number of medical personnel publicly stated their anger at the hypocrisy of allowing ‘terminal sedation’ which is considered good palliative care, while at the same time outlawing choice for voluntary euthanasia.

In recognition of Dr Syme’s ongoing advocacy, a decision was made during the 2006 *Dying with Dignity Victoria* Annual General Meeting, to award a periodic ‘Rodney Syme Medal’ for distinguished contribution towards the cause of

‘dying with dignity’. SAVES extends its admiration of Dr Syme’s courageous actions towards law reform.

Julia Anaf

References:

1. Davies, J (2007) ‘Terminal Answer’, *The Bulletin*, November 5th.
2. Ibid p30.
3. Ibid p.33
4. Otlowski, M (1997) *Voluntary Euthanasia and the Common Law*, Oxford University Press p. 240
5. Kuhse H (2004) *Submission to the Assisted Dying for the Terminally Ill Bill Committee*, Centre for Human Bioethics, Monash University, Clayton 3168
6. Magnusson, R (2004) ‘Euthanasia: above ground, below ground’ *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 30: 441-446
7. Nelson, B. Channel 9 ‘Sixty Minutes’, (9th October 1994)
8. Zinn C. (1995) ‘Australian Doctors go public over euthanasia’ *British Medical Journal* 310:895, News Item 8th April

President’s report November 2007 meeting

SAVES president Frances Coombe opened the November meeting with a sincere thank you to members who helped the society over what has been an extremely busy period. SAVES hired a marquee in Rundle Mall on Friday November 9th between 9.00 am and 9.00 pm for an ‘Awareness Day’ that attracted much public interest. Many members of the public signed petitions in support of the *Voluntary Euthanasia* bill, and SAVES members who volunteered on the day distributed a wide range of literature. Following shortly after was the annual Shirley Nolan Rally, and the SAVES campaign in the electorate of Sturt. Scheduled Awareness Days on the steps of Parliament House were also held.

Frances spoke of great interest in the federal election, and our campaign in Sturt, where Hon Christopher Pyne retained his seat with a greatly reduced margin. Dr Philip Nitschke stood in the seat of Menzies where he gained 3.9% of the vote.

Frances noted how Christian fundamentalism and religious obstructionism continue to ‘give religion a bad name’, and she expressed her

appreciation to member, Ian Wood, who sent letters to MPs concerning the level of Christian support for choice for voluntary euthanasia. (One of his letters is reproduced in this bulletin). Petitions have been presented by supportive MPs in both SA houses four times during the year. Frances mentioned that Hon Bob Such’s *Voluntary Euthanasia Bill 2007* was likely to lapse as December sittings would most likely be cancelled.

Late in 2007 the Hon Stephanie Key MP read a grievance in parliament speaking of her concern that voluntary euthanasia legislation had not been passed when so much public support has been shown over such a long period of time.

Greens MP and SAVES member, the Hon Mark Parnell, stated in his speech at the Shirley Nolan Rally that he would introduce a Voluntary Euthanasia Bill in consultation with SAVES and other appropriate parties. SAVES is currently considering the next Bill.

Frances also noted the previously mentioned article in *The Bulletin* discussing Dr Rodney Syme’s ongoing advocacy and assistance, including that for the late Steve Guest, former advisor to the Cain Labor government. Dr Syme has reiterated that he will continue to offer assistance in defiance of the law, stating:

I intend to keep on talking and acting in good medical faith and the authorities can jolly well come and get me...I’m not doing it quietly any more.

In Western Australia the WA Law Reform Commission has called on the state government to set up an inquiry into the laws governing voluntary euthanasia amid calls for ‘mercy killings’ to be treated differently to murder, attracting a more lenient penalty.

In the UK the Lawyers' Christian Fellowship has lamented the coming into force of the *Mental Capacity* Act, stating that it was a sad day for many elderly and vulnerable people whose lives could be put at risk. The Act has been referred to as ‘back-door euthanasia’. Frances stated that the same argument was made here in SA when

the *Consent to Medical Treatment and Palliative Care Act* was passed in 1995.

More than 30 Britons have made written statements confessing to helping friends or relatives die at a Swiss euthanasia clinic as part of a test case to change the law. There has also been a legal challenge by a woman suffering from multiple sclerosis, seeking the right to have her husband accompany her to the Dignitas clinic in Zurich without threat of prosecution, and seeking a statement from the Department of Public Prosecutions clarifying the law.

Dignitas has launched a service which has been described as 'death on wheels'. Mobile teams now meet those who want to die at the location of their choice. An official and a nurse then provide the person with a lethal dose of chemicals to be taken intravenously or orally. They later call police to report the suicide. This move comes after the Swiss-based organisation lost its lease on the Zurich flat where hundreds of people have been assisted to die.

Seven hundred and fifty three foreigners have visited the group's Zurich flat during the last eight years, ending their lives with an overdose of barbituates. The head of Dignitas, Ludwig Minelli, states that Dignitas is helping many more people to live than to die, but the media are not so interested in this reality.

As Minelli claims, approximately 70% of clients who gain approval to end their lives through Swiss law never follow through, discovering that they 'have much more strength than they ever thought they had'. The German branch of a Swiss right-to-die organization has also unleashed a storm of protest by saying it is planning to carry out an assisted suicide in Germany.

In further international news, Frances advised members that in the Colombian Senate a bill with the aim of establishing 'norms' for voluntary euthanasia was withdrawn, as sponsors of the measure said they lacked the votes to ensure passage. The Catholic bishops of Colombia have re-stated their strong opposition to legislation that would allow for voluntary

euthanasia, stating that all human life should have legal protection, and making a claim that the innate dignity of the human person is not diminished by disease, pain, and suffering.

The USA has decided not to extradite Reverend George David Exoo, an ordained Unitarian minister, human rights activist, and leader in the international Right-to-Die Movement, who was to face charges of 'assisting a suicide' in Ireland. The judge found that neither federal nor state laws would support a conviction for any wrongdoing on his part.

Rev. Exoo would have become the first person to be extradited from any country on an assisted suicide charge. He had travelled to Dublin in 2002 to provide 48 year old Rosemary Toole with pastoral counseling, prayer, and a compassionate presence as she ended her life by her own hand, taking a massive overdose of sleeping pills mixed with alcohol, and inhaling helium gas.

In Montana USA two terminally ill men and four physicians, have filed a lawsuit aimed at decriminalizing assisted suicide. The plaintiffs argue the state constitution provides '*unusually strong protections for the rights of Montana residents to individual dignity and privacy, and protecting the right of such patients to control their own death by obtaining medications from their physician to enable a peaceful death, if they so choose.*'

In Warsaw Poland a 33-year old man who has been almost completely paralyzed for over 14 years, has had his motion dismissed for cessation of the therapy which keeps him alive. In spite of the court's negative decision, Janusz Switaj is determined to keep on fighting for his right to die.

Following this overview of national and international news Frances invited the audience to stay for a viewing of the acclaimed video 'Consider the End' by Sir Ludovic Kennedy. The meeting ended with informal discussion and refreshments.

Thank you Brenda

SAVES committee expresses their heartfelt thanks to Brenda Aynsley, our web manager and former committee member, who is stepping down from the position after many years. Brenda was instrumental in the initial set up stage of the site, has overseen interim reviews, and has managed the site on a voluntary basis since its inception. Her commitment and expertise was brought to bear during the recent federal election, as acknowledged elsewhere in this newsletter.

A small gesture of appreciation has been sent to Brenda on behalf of SAVES. We wish her all the very best for the future.

Urgent call!

SAVES is calling for the assistance of a skilled voluntary web manager to maintain the integrity of the website. The main duties include making content changes under the direction of the committee, and uploading copies of the *VE Bulletin*.

There will be scope for other initiatives to make the site interactive and to respond to political campaign strategies etc.

This is an exciting opportunity to make an important contribution to achieving SAVES primary aim.

A sincere thank you

During the Federal election period last November we embarked for the first time on two challenging projects; a letter boxing campaign in the electorate of Sturt, and writing / emailing all South Australian House of Representatives and Senate candidates, 120 in all, to ascertain their positions on the principle of choice for voluntary euthanasia. It is vital that election candidates know voluntary euthanasia to be an important issue for South Australians and it is important that SAVES is a strong, active lobbying organisation.

Such ambitious undertakings would not have been possible without the generous financial and

physical help of SAVES members. Brian and Glennis overnight “folded and stuffed” around 700 letters for dispatch to members. Ronald organised the letterboxing of flyers, no mean feat for an area of around 30,000 houses, and our web manager Brenda designed and managed the compiling of the election site where candidate positions were listed on our website under categories of ‘supportive’, ‘opposed’, ‘undecided’ and ‘no response’ - take a look at www.saves.asn.au. Brenda spent a great deal of her own time, beyond the financial support given by SAVES for her to employ an assistant. Members, many of them elderly, walked the streets delivering flyers in hot conditions. Others doggedly persisted in their attempts to get straightforward answers to their questions and indeed, on many occasions, any answers at all. (The SAVES media release on page 10 shows the shame of this further.)

I was greatly heartened by the hard work given so generously by all concerned. Thank you most sincerely. I hope I can call on you again, and on other members for a similar larger project at the next State election. I welcome any input from members about this.

Frances Coombe

A reflection – Dr Rosemary Jones

Dr Rosemary Jones has kindly agreed to the publication of her address to the Shirley Nolan Day rally:

‘COURAGE’

I would like to talk about the courage of people who are dying and who would like to choose the option of voluntary euthanasia. I would like to talk about the courage of those of you who are workers in the cause of legitimising the practice of voluntary euthanasia, and to that I would like to add my personal experience that is in some curious way not unconnected to what we are commemorating today.

This celebrates not only Shirley’s manner of passing but also the important work she did when she was younger and stronger.

When I first 'came out' as a transsexual, the conclusion of many of my patients was that I was exhibiting courage. These comments left me somewhat puzzled, as I could not conceive that what I was doing was that courageous and, as I saw it, I had no alternative. In fact, of course, I did have an alternative to continue as Robert, just as all of you here have the alternative to die naturally or to die by assisted death. I think we all know which of the two we would prefer. It is not always easy to take a public stand when you are not used to this, and when you are essentially a private person. In that sense I admire each and every one of you for, indeed, having the courage to stand up and be counted in a cause that enjoys widespread support but has some powerful antagonists.

In a similar way I also admired the courage of my brother, Brian. He lived for two years with myelodysplasia, and in that time the life was slowly but inexorably squeezed out of him. I was frequently in touch with him by telephone in England and consider myself privileged to really get to know this brother who was indeed, a 'man's man' in every sense of the word. It became inevitable that I would compare and contrast my gender situation with his, and in many ways his masculinity shamed me into accepting and proclaiming my own femininity. As is so often the case then, the courage of one who is dying gives the courage to another to go on living.

The interesting irony is that he was the recipient of a bone marrow transplant as a result of the effective functioning of the Anthony Nolan Trust that Shirley set up to assist her own son, Anthony, find a bone marrow graft, and has since become perpetuated in his memory.

So the wheels continue to turn in this farce that we call life and these apparent coincidences continue to amuse us. As we stand today in the sunshine we remember with affection the true courage of these two people. It is to be hoped that each and every one of us continues to attempt to emulate the courage that these two demonstrated.

A member writes

SAVES member Ian Wood has written many letters to members of parliament advocating for the right to choose voluntary euthanasia. Some of these have been published in earlier editions of the *VE Bulletin*. SAVES commends Ian and other members who help keep the issue on the 'front-burner'. A letter written by Ian in December to Senator Christopher Pyne is reproduced below.

Dear Mr Pyne

I found it ironic that you are pictured in the recent *Alzheimers Newsletter*, along with Senator Grant Chapman, as supporters of World Alzheimers Day. I challenge you to have your photo in the next *Alzheimers Newsletter*, holding the hand of a person in the end stages of Alzheimers, while **you** wait for them to starve to death. While you are sitting, waiting, just consider how much more loving and compassionate it would be for the family and carers, if that person was able to "slip away" **before** going through the starvation process, providing that had been the expressed wish of the patient. Just consider, and be aware, that it is you who are responsible for this prolonging of suffering and mental anguish.

My mother died at Christmas, three years ago. Here is an extract of a letter I wrote to my local MP, Rob Kerin, just before she died -

Dear Rob

My Mother, whom I love dearly, is dying from Alzheimer's.

Over the past 7 ½ years I have watched her gradually deteriorate from a vibrant, intelligent and articulate woman at the age of 81, to a shell of her former self.

In fact, looking at her yesterday, with her eyes sunken into an emaciated head, and a hand of just skin and bone appearing from the bedclothes, I came to accept that the person I knew as my mother is now dead, and that unfortunately some parts of her body are still just alive.

However I am told under South Australian law, that while she can still be given even minimal amounts of food, "palliative care" in the form of a morphine pump cannot be instigated, unless she shows obvious signs of pain or distress.

So, in the eyes of your laws, you apparently consider it more compassionate and caring for a fellow human to let that person gradually starve to death, rather than to allow them to be put into a sleep from which they will not awake. As a family, my daughters and my wife and my sister find this extremely distressing.

In fact, yesterday I was reliably informed that for over 50% of Alzheimer's patients, starvation is the actual cause of death. I find it impossible to believe this is the most humane way we, as a caring society, can find of letting such people die.

SAVES encourages all members to contact their members of parliament to make their views known. Ian Wood has been setting a great example.

Chaplain urges South Australian MPs to support the 'VE Bill'

The following letter was sent to state parliamentarians by the Reverend Trevor Bentsch, Baptist Chaplain, Queen Elizabeth and Calvary Hospitals, Adelaide:

'My approach to the issue of Voluntary Euthanasia is from the position of a liberal Christian who seeks to find the way that is most consistent with what we know about the teaching and example of Jesus.

The guidance that I get, mainly from the four gospels, could be put under four headings:

1. The importance of every individual person
2. The need to make the most of each day
3. The obligation to relieve illness and suffering wherever possible, and
4. To do for others what you would want them to do for you.

My support for voluntary euthanasia comes from these with an element of my own selfishness. I had no control over my entry into the world but I

want some control over the exit. I want the right to say when I have finally had enough.

Through many years of hospital chaplaincy I have continued to be inspired by the courage with which most people bear serious illness, even when it is terminal, but I cannot agree with those who say suffering is good.

The sanctity of life is a noble concept, but it is a belief that can be used to support certain arguments while being conveniently neglected in the realities of life such as war and punishment. For example, a statement by Cardinal Ratzinger, now Pope, says:

"Not all moral issues have the same moral weight as abortion and euthanasia. For example, if a Catholic were to be at odds with the Holy Father on the application of capital punishment or on the decision to wage war, he would not for that reason be considered unworthy to present himself to receive Holy Communion... it may still be permissible to... have recourse to capital punishment. There may be a legitimate diversity of opinion even among Catholics about waging war and applying the death penalty, but not, however, with regard to abortion and euthanasia,"(Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, The Tablet, 10 July 2004)

This is an example of the strange set of priorities you can arrive at: that a diversity of opinion about waging war is legitimate while the same approach to euthanasia with regard to a terminally ill person should not be possible!!!

Of the Christian values, compassion must surely be near the top of the list. I urge you to support and vote for the Bob Such *Voluntary Euthanasia Bill*.

SAVES greatly appreciates Reverend Bentsch's advocacy for those who suffer unnecessarily at the end of life.

Voluntary Euthanasia Bill 2007

South Australia's *Voluntary Euthanasia Bill 2007*, introduced by Hon Dr Bob Such, is under debate in the lower house. Members will be kept informed of legislative developments as they arise.

From the journals

Several international peer reviewed journals have recently published articles for those with an interest in end-of-life decision making.

One article in the *Journal of Medical Ethics* (1) considers the arguments around 'active' and 'passive' euthanasia, and the view of proponents of the right to choose that these terms represent a false distinction. The article argues that this distinction is lesser than generally portrayed in the wider literature. This author argues that 'if a patient is mentally competent and wants to die, his body itself constitutes unwarranted life support unfairly prolonging his or her mental life'.

The Dec 2007 edition of the same journal (2) reports on a comparative longitudinal study with similar 1987 and 1993 research on the current state of opinion and practice among doctors in Victoria. A key finding was that there is significant disagreement among doctors as to what actually constitutes euthanasia. A majority (62%) of respondents claimed that where palliative measures will foreseeably shorten the patient's life to some degree, this would not be considered euthanasia.

The fact that there is no common agreement about the meaning of the term 'euthanasia' was clearly revealed in respondents' comments, and the researchers contend that 'this disagreement may contribute to confusion in the euthanasia debate, especially where discussants may not be aware of differences in their conception of euthanasia'.

The research findings were that of the 532 respondents who consider euthanasia to be the *intentional* hastening of death, 49% supported and 48% opposed legalisation of voluntary euthanasia (3% undecided).

The journal *Palliative Medicine* (3) reports on research undertaken to gain insight into the emotional impact on doctors who perform euthanasia in the Netherlands. Although this is a very rare occurrence for any doctor, it has a

major emotional impact. Four emotional phases are identified: before (tension), during (loss), and after the event (relief). The research identified the need for doctors to respond to the needs of patients, but also their own needs. The research concluded that 'more openness, as in the Dutch situation, appears to have been beneficial, judging from the experiences of the younger physicians'. In a new student-centered vocational training curriculum focusing on general practice, trainee doctors are also assisted to 'develop their own perspective on issues concerning death and dying'.

References:

1. Shaw, D (2007) 'The body as unwarranted life support: a new perspective on euthanasia', *Journal of Medical Ethics* 33.9 p519 (3).
2. Neil, D (2007) 'End-of -life decisions in medical practice: a survey of doctors in Victoria (Australia).
3. van Marwijk, H; Haverkate, L; van Royen, P et.al 'Impact of euthanasia on primary care physicians in the Netherlands' (2007) *Palliative Medicine* 21:609-614

International news

Luxembourg

Jacqueline Herremans, President, World Federation of Right to Die Societies, writes that on February 19th 2008 the Parliament of Grand Duchy of Luxembourg approved decriminalization of voluntary euthanasia. Now the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg allow patients to 'receive the medical assistance to make the ultimate moment of their life an act of freedom'.

Congratulations to ADMD-Luxembourg.

Canada

On Saturday December 8th 2007 it was reported by Dan Ward of the *Vancouver Sun* that the right-to-die debate is likely to split voters next year in Washington State when popular former governor Booth Gardner promotes a ballot initiative that would legalise assisted- suicide. Mr Gardner, who has been suffering the effects of Parkinson's disease for more than 14 years, supports the Oregon law allowing physicians to provide dying patients with a lethal dose of narcotics.

Mr Gardner has declared his intention to end his own life when he can no longer tolerate the effects of Parkinson's disease on his body and mind. Gardner was the Democratic governor in 1991 when a similar ballot initiative was narrowly defeated. As the law only applies to terminally ill people it cannot assist Mr Gardner personally. The Washington measure is expected to be strongly opposed by the Catholic and evangelical churches and some disability groups.

Also in Canada the findings of a new Angus Reid Strategies poll exploring the moral values of Canadians are that despite its conservative government, Canadians are 'pretty accepting in general', according to chief research officer, Andrew Grenville. For instance, regardless of whether or not they thought it should be legal, 61% of the 1,004 adult Canadians responding to an online survey, found abortion and euthanasia morally acceptable, 59% supported same-sex relations, and 64% embryonic stem cell research.

University of Toronto philosophy professor Wayne Sumner maintains this is because 'people's moral responses tend to depend on whether they see the activity in question as having any victims'.

Reference: Toronto Sun 22 Dec 2007

USA

Jeff Kosseff (*The Oregonian* newspaper) published an article on 14th Jan 2008 entitled 'Assisted suicide falls off the radar'. It reported that assisted- suicide, once a key pro-life issue, is 'no longer mentioned in Congress or by candidates'. Republican presidential candidates typically focus on opposing abortion, funding for embryonic stem-cell research, and human cloning; while Democrats state that they will oppose bans on funding embryonic stem-cell research and promote pro-choice initiatives.

Physician-assisted suicide is not mentioned. This is thought to be due to the Democrats' takeover of Congress last year which makes any federal law against Oregon's position less likely.

Mexico

On the 4th December 2007 Miguel Gutierrez (Reuters) reported that legislation has been

passed in Mexico City to approve a law to allow terminally ill people the right to refuse treatment. He stated that it was the 'latest challenge to the church in the capital of the world's second-largest Roman Catholic nation'. Mexico City Congress voted unanimously in favor of this bill enabling patients suffering incurable illnesses to sign a notarised document for cessation of treatment, if treatment cannot provide a cure but only prolong life.

Sweden

Swedish Radio reported on the 6th Dec 2007 that one third of Swedish doctors would consider aiding in an assisted-suicide if the patient was terminally ill or in severe pain, was not depressed, and not suffering from a psychological illness. The study included 1200 doctors from across the medical field. Assisted-suicide or euthanasia is against the law in Sweden.

New Zealand

Lesley Martin, the New Zealand public face of advocacy for the right to choose voluntary euthanasia, has stated that she looks to a time when the Dignity New Zealand Trust which she founded can move on without her. Ms Martin makes a comparison between the current historic phase of advocacy for the dying and that of the early hospice movement. She argues 'we're in the same position they were in 30 years ago, trying to address the needs of the dying and having to fundraise through garage sales and sausage sizzles.'

Ms Martin's vision is the establishment of 'dignity havens' that would allow 'parallel options' or choices for those seeking greater autonomy over the dying process while allowing hospices to maintain their own philosophical stance. She believes that New Zealand will one day have legislation allowing voluntary euthanasia, and that the trust will have the appropriate infrastructure in place to allow it.

Wallet cards for advance directives

SAVES has for some time now provided wallet cards for members to carry with them to advise that they have completed an advance directive under the *Consent to Medical Treatment and*

Palliative Care Act. As advance directives may also be completed under the *Guardianship and Administration Act*, SAVES has reworded the card accordingly. A copy of the wallet card is included in this edition of the *VE Bulletin*

Wallet cards may also be collected at SAVES general meetings or by sending a stamped self-addressed envelope to the honorary secretary.

As many of SAVES members have previously paid their membership contributions for more than one year in advance, I have included a membership renewal form for only those members whose contributions fell due on March 1st 2008

**Gerry Versteeg
Membership Officer**

MEDIA RELEASE

20/11/07

MAKE YOUR CANDIDATES ACCOUNTABLE

In 1997 Federal Parliament passed Kevin Andrews' *Euthanasia Laws Act 1997*; overturning the Northern Territory's *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act 1995*; the world's first voluntary euthanasia law.

A democratically elected law murdered.

Three South Australian candidates standing for this Federal election voted to overturn that law:

Grant Chapman – Liberal candidate for the Senate

Andrew Southcott – Liberal candidate for House of Representatives - Boothby

Christopher Pyne – Liberal candidate for House of Representatives - Sturt

The Northern Territory voluntary euthanasia law could be re-instated by the new Federal parliament but do you know how your candidates are likely to vote on such a bill?

Find out! The SAVES website www.saves.asn.au is listing all candidates' positions on the principle of choice for voluntary euthanasia (to be finalised Friday).

The major players' positions:

Democrats and Greens candidates are all supportive.

Family First candidates are all opposed.

Labor – only 4 out of 14 candidates have bothered to reply so far to repeated requests for their positions. Two are supportive.

Liberal – only 6 out of 15 candidates have bothered. One is supportive.

SAVES President Frances Coombe urges voters "You have a right to know the views of your candidates. Don't be satisfied with being told that voluntary euthanasia is a conscience vote. Your conscience shouldn't be second fiddle. This system is an abdication of our lawmakers' duty to rationally consider the harm and the good of bills before them."

Vote for choice and democratic rights.

NOTICE OF 2008 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

SA Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc (SAVES) at the Disability Information and Resource Centre (DIRC)
195 Gilles St Adelaide.

2.15 pm 20th April 2008

Guest speaker will be Hon Mark Parnell MP (Greens) who will speak on the Greens current voluntary euthanasia bills in the federal and Victorian parliaments, and plans for a bill in SA.

Business will include the president's and treasurer's reports and election of office bearers and other committee members for a period of one year. Written nominations for official positions, signed by nominating and nominated persons should be received by 14th April 2008

Other public meeting dates for 2008: 20th July, 16th November

A BEQUEST is one way to make a significant gift to further the aim of the society, which is to achieve law reform to allow choice for voluntary euthanasia.

The appropriate wording for the gift of a specific sum is *'I bequeath to the South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc the sum of \$.....'* In the unlikely event that you wish to leave your entire estate to SAVES it would read *'I give, devise and bequeath the whole of my real and personal estate to the South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc'*.

South Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc. (SAVES)

Annual Membership Fees: Single \$ 20.00 (concession \$ 10.00) Double \$ 25.00 (concession \$ 14.00)

Life Membership: Single \$ 170.00, Double \$ 280.00

Annual Fees fall due at the end of February. Payment for two years or more reduces handling and costs.

Mr/Mrs/Ms/Other Date

Address
. Postcode

| | |
|-------------------|-----------|
| <u>Office use</u> | |
| Database | Treasurer |
| Changes | Letter |

Email address if you want to be advised of SAVES activities

Date of birth (optional) **Membership fees for years \$-----**

Make cheque or money order payable to SAVES and send to:

SAVES Membership Officer, PO Box 2151, Kent Town SA 5071 **Donation \$-----**

Or pay by Electronic Funds Transfer (please quote name and type of payment) to: **TOTAL \$-----**

Commonwealth Bank BSB 065 129 account number 00901742

Please send this membership form to the above address or email to info@saves.asn.au when paying by electronic means, to ensure proper identification of your membership.

SAVES members support the Society's primary objective which is a change in the law, so that in appropriate circumstances and with defined safeguards, death may be brought about as an option of last resort in medical practice. These circumstances include the free and informed request of the patient and the free exercise of professional judgement and conscience of the doctor.

SAVES IS NOT ABLE TO HELP PEOPLE END THEIR LIVES

SAVES' Primary Objective:

A change to the law in South Australia so that in appropriate circumstances, and with defined safeguards, death may be brought about as an option of last resort in medical practice. These circumstances include the free and informed request of the patient and the free exercise of professional medical judgment and conscience of the doctor.



Committee:

| | |
|--------------------------|--|
| President | Frances Coombe |
| Vice Presidents | Julia Anaf Mary Gallnor |
| Hon. Secretary | Anne Hirsch |
| Administrative Secretary | Jan Seaman |
| Hon. Treasurer | Hamish Claxton |
| Minutes Secretary | Leonie Moore |
| Patrons | Emeritus Professor J.A. Richardson Emeritus Professor Graham Nerlich |
| Telephone | |
| Internet | 8379 3421 (prefixes: interstate 08, international +61 8) www.saves.asn.au |

The VE Bulletin is published three times a year by the SA Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc. (SAVES). Letters, articles and other material for possible publication are welcome and should be sent to *The VE Bulletin Editor, SAVES, PO Box 2151, Kent Town SA 5071.*

The statements and views expressed by contributors do not necessarily represent SAVES official policy. Material in this publication may be freely reproduced provided it is in context and given appropriate acknowledgement.

Editor: Julia Anaf