



NT Voluntary Euthanasia Society Inc

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Patron: Mr Marshall Perron
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Newsletter

May 2005

Federal anti-suicide Legislation

A Senate inquiry into the Criminal Code Amendment (Suicide Related Material Offences) Bill which lapsed after the general election was announced last year was recommenced on 16 March 2005. Submissions were called for from interested parties and several prominent people including Philip Nitschke attended the public hearing held in Canberra on Thursday April 14th 2005. The transcript of this hearing can be found at <http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commtee/S8226.pdf>

The legislation is expected to be voted on in May and become law in November.

World Federation Conference in Tokyo 2004

Forty-nine foreign delegates and nearly 400 Japanese participants attended the 15th conference of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies in Tokyo from September 30th to October 3rd 2004. The conference was most generously hosted by the Japan Society for Dying with Dignity. This was the third time Japan has played host to the rest of the world. Currently, the World Federation member groups number forty including three new organizations added at the conference – ‘Libera Uscita’ of Rome, Italy, Final Exit Network of Atlanta, USA and SAVES of Durban, South Africa (re-admitted after lapsed membership).

The theme of the conference was the ‘living will’ or ‘advance directive’. This is a document that allows individuals to state the type of medical care they would like to receive if they become unable to control this because of their illness. Michio Arakawa, Executive Director of the Japan Society, compiled and reported on a survey of living wills in the World Federation member countries. Not all areas have living will legislation but the NT has the *Natural Death Act* which allows for refusal of medical treatment. A copy of the required schedule can be downloaded from the government website or go to a community care centre and ask for one.

Other inspirational speakers included Rob Jonquiere, CEO of Right to Die Netherlands (NVVE) who reported on the Life Cycle of Living Wills and also presented a précis of general reports from member societies. Michael Irwin, outgoing President of the World Federation spoke of Pro-Choice Living Wills. Hidayat Sakurai, Vice President of the Japan Medical Association, talked about the attitudes of that association towards terminal care. Richard MacDonald spoke on “A hastened death – who makes the choice?”. Derek Humphry, President of ERGO and founder of the Hemlock Society in 1980, discussed the future of the right to die movement.

The George Saba Medal (previously awarded to Marshall Perron) was awarded to the Japan society in recognition of its contribution to the World Federation. The first Marilyn Seguin Award was presented to Beatriz Gomez, founding member and long-time President of Fundacion Pro Derecho a Morir Dignamente (DMD) of Colombia. Derek Humphry was named as an honorary World Federation Board Member as an acknowledgment of his 25 years service.

The new President is Jacob Kohnstamm (Chairman of NVVE) with Jacqueline Herreman (President of the Association for the Right to die with dignity in Brussels). Libby Drake continues as Secretary, a position she has more than filled for six years. A full list of office bearers and more on the conference can be found on the World Federation website www.worldrtd.net NVVE generously offered to administer this website for the next two years and to provide financial support for the President's travel and clerical needs.

The following statement was issued at the conference as the Tokyo Declaration:

'Health professionals attending the 15th world conference of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies, in Tokyo in 2004, declare their support for all patients having living wills and other advance directives, documenting their treatment preferences when near the end of life. Also we believe that physicians, nurses and others caring for patients must acknowledge and follow the directives provided in these documents, even when the choices made by the patient may lead to what may be an unintentionally induced hastened death.'

Decisions made at the delegates meetings included:

- A working group to develop uniformity on end of life terminology and definitions. This group will report at the 2006 conference.
- New maximum membership fees US\$1000 and minimum US\$50.
- A new category of Associate Membership for organizations that support the World Federation ideals but are mainly active in related fields such as human rights.

The next conference is to be held in Toronto, Canada in 2006; DMD has offered to host the 2008 conference in Colombia.

3rd Exit International Conference – Brisbane 2005

Exit's 3rd biennial conference is to be held at the Brisbane Convention and Entertainment Centre, Southbank Brisbane on 5-6 November 2005. (Note new dates and location.)

The following sessions are provisionally scheduled:

- Tales from the Peanut (Peaceful Pill) weekend
- Too Sick to Live – Exit Clinics unveiled with MND, MS, Emphysema, Cancer
- People Power – VE as a new social movement
- VE in the Media – the Politics of Portrayal and Betrayal
- God's Mandate in the House – the Role of Religion in Australian Politics Today
- Law Reform vs Direct Action
- Surviving the next 3 years – the future for VE with Howard

Other activities will include street actions with a visit to Roma Street police headquarters, book readings and signings, and the presentation of the 2005 Bob Dent Award.

Further information and registration form can be found on the Exit website <http://www.exitinternational.net> or telephone 0500 831 929.

New VE Book

Launched in Sydney in March was *killing me softly – Voluntary Euthanasia and the Road to the Peaceful Pill* by Dr Philip Nitschke & Dr Fiona Stewart (published by Penguin). A second launching was held at the Roma Bar in Darwin on April 12th 2005 with Sue Carter MLA Port Darwin and Jon Tippet QC doing the honours. It was fitting that a launch should occur here because Darwin marked the start of Philip's road to the peaceful pill. He has been called both a dangerous villain and compassionate hero and where you stand in the euthanasia debate would determine which label you would use. This book is a summary of where Dr Nitschke is now and how he got there. Right to Life groups have called for his book to be banned but it is not a 'how-to' but a 'why' book. In an interview with the *Northern Territory News* he said "The follow-up book will be far more contentious because it will be a 'how-to' and we will have to publish that ourselves as no one will want to take on that responsibility." In 1996, Dr Nitschke became the first doctor in the world to legally administer VE under Marshall Perron's *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act* described by Mr Tippet as "one of the most enlightened pieces of legislation in one of the least enlightened jurisdictions". Sadly, the Federal Government overturned that legislation and no other jurisdiction in Australia has had the courage to enact their version of it although many individual politicians have tried. With a foreword by Marshall Perron, *killing me softly* is an important addition to the VE debate and should be read by supporters and opponents alike

Hospice to Open in Darwin

Northern Territory News announced the arrival of Dr Mark Boughey to be Director of Palliative Medicine at the hospice to be opened on the Royal Darwin Hospital Campus later this year. He believes that the new palliative care services will ease the fear of dying that makes people seek out euthanasia. However, he is also quoted as saying "Working in palliative care, our aim is to give people the best quality of life. But when it becomes a situation when we are prolonging dying, then you don't want to prolong someone's death." NTVES welcomes the hospice and its doctor but looks forward to Statehood for the NT and the revival of the *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act* so that patients again have a choice – first class palliative care service at home or in the hospice or VE if the patient decides that is what is best for him/her.

**THE NTVES NEWSLETTER IS PROUDLY SPONSORED BY
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NTVES appreciates the ongoing support of Sue Carter and her electoral officer Helen in producing and distributing the newsletter. Without this support, distribution would have to be confined to NTVES financial members only.

NTVES OBJECTIVES

- ❖ To 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.
- ❖ To cooperate with other associations with compatible objectives.
- ❖ To develop and maintain a relationship with the NT Government and other related interested parties/groups which will enable the Society to provide effective and timely input to legislation and regulatory processes and policy development.

Note: NTVES membership year is July to June. A renewal form is enclosed for financial members. If a new reader would like to join NTVES, please phone 8945 1446 after June 2.