

**Report to Aboriginal Reference Group: *Rights of the Terminally Ill* Act Education Program 9 July 1996**

- 1 Further to previous report, we have commenced the Arnhem Land legs of the program. Bush holidays in the Port Keats/Daly region have meant we have had to re-schedule that region for a week or so. The death of a leader in western Arnhem Land has confused issues further which will involve further re-scheduling.
- 2 I have yet to commence the language work, but that will be getting underway this week or as soon as I have information about translating palliative care and natural death material.

**Comments and feedback**

- 1 Going on from the previous report, I would re-iterate in the strongest possible terms the comments made previously with regard to Aboriginal attitudes to the legislation and the damage it is causing Territory Health Services' reputation and standing out bush. Given the gradual improvement over the last decade in attitudes towards the department in the last decade, I believe that the current damage being done is difficult to estimate, but potentially dangerous especially given the general problems and politics of Aboriginal health in the Northern Territory.
- 2 The last week of the program has been carried out in the context of the court challenge, changes to the regulations, and media attention at the sorts of levels Darwin has not seen since the days of the Chamberlain trials. It's been a real charmer of a week for a program that is attempting to deliver information in a calm, low key way. On a number of occasions the education team have had to spend considerable time explaining that they were not there representing the government to "push for" the legislation on its behalf.
- 3 Further to the kinds of responses we have been getting, many responses are now conflating statehood with euthanasia, with calls on the Commonwealth to "protect" against the euthanasia legislation, whereby "statehood" is seen as a potential threat to Aboriginal beliefs and interests. This may well have long term implications for all the sides of politics who are supportive of statehood.

- 4 One community is writing a letter to the PM and CM calling in the Act to be repealed and urging the Commonwealth to step in to repeal the law. There are now two petitions we are aware of along the same lines.
- 5 A community clinic has requested that the Minister for Health supply a letter that can be pinned to the clinic door giving a commitment that no patient referred by that clinic to being hospitalised in Darwin would be subject of euthanasia.
- 6 There has been some hostility to the team and the process from some non-Aboriginal clinic staff — and in at least one case active obstructionism to the process we have been trying to carry out. Some of this obstructionism has been happening in the face of widespread community desire to at least know what is in the legislation (even if they don't like the content of same!).

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