



# End-of-Life Choice

August/September 2013

Voluntary Euthanasia Society of New Zealand, Inc.

Issue 31

## Leadership and Committee Changes

From the National Committee

You may be aware of some recent changes to the structure of the End-of-Life Choice team, and most recently, the dual resignations of Secretary James Armour and President Carole Sweney. The National Committee expresses gratitude to James and Carole, for the countless hours they have spent dedicated to the issue of legalising end-of-life choice in New Zealand.

Now it is time to focus efforts on passage of legislation to advance rights at the end of life. We are in the process of transitioning from a more conservative Society to one that is progressive and proactive. We have an abundance of talent amongst the members. The strategic goals of the National Committee remain sensible and compassionate:

To allocate roles for the current National Committee members, which reflect and build upon their own personal skills and talents.

To work towards passage of the Bill into law.

To strengthen and increase local branches and encourage community involvement.

To increase funding of EOLC at the national level to \$150,000 per annum.

To improve the functioning of the organisation through better processes.

To develop EOLC options for implementation after the Bill is passed into law.

To achieve these goals, our committee will work hard, and work together to engage communities in the conversations and debates around end-of-life rights. Your support is vital as we move forward in achieving these goals, which will ultimately benefit all New Zealanders. Please give us this support and we will give you our energy. You will be surprised at what we can accomplish together.

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## Yvonne Shaw Appointed Executive Officer

We are pleased to announce that Yvonne Shaw, our Media and Political Relations manager, has taken on the new role of Executive Officer for End-of-Life Choice. The National Committee voted for this change at the latest NC meeting in order to strengthen the capacity of the Society with professionally-run leadership, improve its decision-making capabilities, produce better accountability, and to better meet its objectives surrounding passage of legalised assisted dying legislation in New Zealand.



In her new capacity Yvonne will continue to serve as an educator on how Oregon's Death with Dignity Act works in America, as well as play a more active role in the day-to-day business operations of the Society. By appointing Yvonne as Executive Officer, the Society capitalises not only on her background in Oregon's law, but also on her 15 years of volunteer and non-profit program management experience.

Most members have likely seen Yvonne in action at public meetings and in the media, and will appreciate what an asset she is for EOLC. She has also been instrumental in updating our systems and procedures. One of Yvonne's priorities is to bolster volunteer involvement in the End-of-Life-Choice Bill and the legislation around it and assist with improving the processes of the Society.

Show your support for End-of-life choice by writing to your MP and sharing your story.

# EOLC Bill Remains In Ballot Box

Yvonne Shaw

On July 17<sup>th</sup> the *New Zealand Herald* ran an article by Isaac Davidson headlined "Euthanasia Bill Under Party Pressure." The article went on to say that "Labour MP Maryan Street is under pressure to drop a member's bill which would legalise euthanasia because her party is concerned it could be a negative distraction in the lead-up to the general election next year."

Members and friends of EOLC have expressed concern over the possibility of the Hon. Maryan Street withdrawing the End-Of-Life Choice Bill from the ballot box, as a result of political pressure. Please rest assured that Maryan has reiterated her dedication to the End-of-Life Choice/VESNZ Inc. agenda, and the End-Of-Life Choice Bill in particular.

In an election year, some important pieces of legislation become vulnerable because they require lengthy and thoughtful discussions which can be difficult for candidates also juggling constituents' priorities and campaign obligations. The End-of-Life Choice Bill may well be one of those pieces of legislation. The dynamics of vulnerability in the legislative process can be devastating for the supporters of Bills like ours. While we don't know at this moment if the Bill will be drawn or, indeed, withdrawn, we do know that this issue deserves to be heard as far as possible with the undivided attention of Members of Parliament. It is deserving of the engagement of the general public. And it is worthy of a proper debate.

## Kathleen's Story

*Personal story*

Ann David

At the age of 86, my mother Kathleen died in the way she had most feared to die. She had been an ardent supporter of legalised assisted dying and a member of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society, but her plans for autonomy were disrupted by a severe stroke that left her completely paralyzed except in one hand. Verbally, she was unable to communicate by as much as a whimper. Facially, she was unable to smile or to grimace. But she was conscious, we believe, to the end and therein lies the tragedy.

When it became apparent that Kathleen would not make a recovery from her paralyzing stroke, I demanded to see the hospital doctor and insisted on a withdrawal of nutrition and hydration. This was to fulfil a pact between us to help each other to the quickest death in such circumstances.

We were lucky that the doctor on duty that day was a mature Sri Lankan lady; she put up no opposition, agreeing with me that my mother's quality of life would be deplorable even in the highly unlikely event of some slight recovery. Our conversation took place in the hospital corridor outside my mother's room. I wasn't required to sign any papers as far as I remember. The doctor assured me that Kathleen wouldn't suffer thirst, hunger, pain or anxiety while she died as she'd be sedated and medicated all the while.

But I was to learn that sedation does not mean complete oblivion. From time to time during the nine days it took her to die of starvation, Kathleen aroused sufficiently to struggle heartbreakingly, feebly and, to an outside eye, almost imperceptibly against the orderlies who tended to her body. Her dignity was violated, although with the best of intentions, and she felt the humiliation even in

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## Mystery Break Raffle Planned

In October we will have an EOLC raffle to raise funds for our campaign. There will be five equal prizes of an **Air New Zealand**

### **Mystery Break.**

Five lucky winners will each win return flights for two to a



mystery destination in New Zealand, two nights' accommodation, and return transfers from the airport to their hotel.

The raffle will be drawn on November 29. The winners have up to 12 months to take their prize.

We hope that members will help us either by buying a raffle book themselves (for \$25), or selling the five tickets for \$5 each.

### **How it will work**

Unless we hear from you otherwise, in early October each EOLC household will be sent one book with five \$5 tickets to sell.

**If you do *not* wish to receive the raffle book with five tickets to sell, you may opt out in one of three ways by giving your name and address *clearly*, and stating that you do not wish to receive any books to sell:**

ring the EOLC office 04 938 0317  
email [suzy\\_kokokoro@hotmail.com](mailto:suzy_kokokoro@hotmail.com)  
write EOLC, P O Box 22346  
Khandallah, Wellington 6441

If you would like more than one book, please let us know. If we do not hear from you, a book will be sent early in October. We hope members who are able will make every effort to help our cause. And if you are unable to use the prize yourself, what a wonderful gift it would make!

## Branch Events

### Auckland

Presentation of "The End of Life Bill: What Your MP Needs to Know" will be made at the following venues:

**Aug. 26** Whangarei Focus Group. Phone: 09 436 2349

**Aug. 28** Rotary Club, Half Moon Bay

**Aug. 29** Rotary Club, Whangaparaoa

**Aug. 30** Grey Power, Orewa

**Aug. 31** Public meeting 1pm, Ellerslie War Memorial Community Centre, 138 Main Highway, Ellerslie. Phone: 09 630 7035.

### Kapiti-Horowhenua

**Aug. 6** Probus Club speaking engagement 10:30 am. Probus Club of Waikanae Senior Citizens Hall, Utauta Street Waikanae.

### Bay of Plenty

**Aug. 6** Branch Meeting 7pm. 7 First Ave., Tauranga.

**Aug. 11** House Meeting 2pm. 7 First Ave., Tauranga. Possible showing of the film *How to Die in Oregon* if there is interest.

### Waikato

**Aug. 11** Public Meeting 1.30pm. Community House, 32 Leach St, New Plymouth. Hon. Maryan Street will speak on the End-of-Life Choice Bill. Also an informal meeting with members to discuss possibly setting up a sub branch.

**Aug. 22** Jack Havill has been invited to speak at one of the yearly Ecumenical Series of Lectures on "The Case for Voluntary Euthanasia" 12pm in the Hamilton Council Chambers, Hamilton. Open to the public.

**Aug. 25** Branch Meeting 2pm. 17 Claudelands Rd., CCS Building, Hamilton. Includes a special general meeting to elect officers and committee members.

### Wellington

No branch events scheduled in August/September.

## Approaching Your MP

Wondering what to do today? How about contacting one of your local MPs to set up a meeting in their home office? As a member of EOLC, you have a vested interest in the outcome of any elections and legislation that impacts your end-of-life rights.

You can approach your MPs to find out where they stand (or let them know where you think they should stand) by visiting them at their offices, and telling them why you think this issue is so important. Your personal stories resonate with MPs, and show that you are invested in the outcome. Visits from local constituents are noteworthy for MPs! If you then notify EOLC of the results of your meeting, then we can more readily target which MPs need further lobbying, and which ones are entrenched in their opinions (either for or against) and will not benefit from further approaches.

If you meet with an MP, please contribute to our database of MP information by contacting Yvonne Shaw at by phone or email (see page 4 for contact details). In particular, we are looking for the name of the MP, the date you visited, whether or not the MP is in favour of the Bill, and anything they say that seems relevant. For instance, if an MP responds by saying "I think I am in favour, but I'm concerned about the slippery slope," then we know to address that issue in further contacts with the MP.

**End-of-Life Choice Panel Discussion** presented by U3A Wellington City, with Hon Maryan Street, Dr Brian Ensor, and Yvonne Shaw, moderated by Dr Alistair Macdonald. **Sept. 27**, 10.30am - 12 noon in the Theatrette of the Spectrum Health and Fitness Centre, corner of Johnston Street and Customhouse Quay, Wellington. \$3.

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her disempowered state. My pleas for deeper sedation went unheeded; she had enough, they said, they didn't "think" she was in pain or experiencing psychological anxiety. When I asked how they could be sure given that Kathleen was entirely without means of self expression, they told me there are certain automatic reflexes such as a faster breathing rate that would have warned them of distress and these signs were not apparent in her. Understandably, they were navigating the narrow path between "helping" her passively to die without endangering themselves by crossing any technical line into active assistance. They had records to keep.

For her family, the horror of Kathleen's death lay in the fact that she was sometimes aware, not fully sedated. Every regain of awareness would have been torture to her as she was forced to realize yet again her acute helplessness, her "locked in" dependence, her infuriating inability to communicate. Try as I might, I could never get the medical staff to tell me how long it might take for death to come. They evaded my every attempt, not wanting to make themselves responsible for a promise that might elude them. And so I was never able to encourage Kathleen with anything better than "very soon now, Mum", a hollow encouragement and a seeming lie as the days dragged on without mercy. Did utter despair add itself to her list of sufferings? Almost certainly! Did she think I'd reneged on our pact?

For what purpose was this proud, independent lady subjected to a nine-day ordeal of humiliation, existential suffering and seemingly spiteful denial of respite when she was at her most vulnerable? To pacify what sadistic deity? To satisfy what distorted sense of medical "ethics"? To exempt what lazy, cowardly lawmaker from the nuisance of making better law?



# International Campaign Mounts

David Barber

The campaign for law changes to allow end-of-life choice continues to gather pace and the debate is poised to grab headlines in Britain, France, Canada, and Australia over the next few months.

## Britain

Opposition Labour Party peer Lord Falconer tabled in the House of Lords a private members' Bill to legalise assisted dying that would allow terminally ill adults with less than six months to live to ask doctors to give them medication to end their lives. It would not legalise euthanasia by doctors but would allow patients themselves to take prescribed life-ending medication.

Lord Falconer said his law would safeguard patients, protect family members and ensure involvement of the medical profession "Strictly limited to terminally ill, mentally competent adults, the Bill will not result in more people dying, but in fewer people suffering." A poll found 76% of adults in England and Wales supported it.

## Canada

Quebec is preparing to hold public hearings on Canada's first right-to-die legislation, which would allow doctors to administer fatal medication to patients with an incurable disease "at an advanced state of irreversible decline" and suffering "unbearable physical and psychological pain."

## France

President Francois Hollande promised a national debate on the issue before his government submits a bill which he said would "complete and improve" a 2005 law allowing doctors to cease treatment if terminally ill patients request it. He said that was "already a step in the direction of human dignity." Reuters reported opinion polls showed widespread support for legalised euthanasia in late terminal cases.

## Australia

Philip Nitschke, head of Exit International, launched the Voluntary Euthanasia Party (VEP) and will field Senate candidates in Tasmania, South Australia, and Victoria in the federal election (September 14). He said that although VE was overwhelmingly supported by the electorate, the major political parties had succumbed to attacks by the churches. The Premier of Tasmania has introduced a private member's bill allowing assisted dying for the state's terminally ill.

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