



# End-of-Life Choice

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Issue 30

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## Death with Dignity Legal in Another American state

Lawmakers in Vermont supported the rights of terminally ill individuals and passed a Vermont law designed on the Oregon and Washington Death with Dignity acts. The law, signed 20 May, is the first to be enacted through a legislative process rather than voter referendum.

The new Vermont law emulates the Oregon and Washington Death with Dignity acts and provides a process for mentally competent, terminally ill patients to achieve a peaceful death by ingesting medication provided by their medical practitioner.

This was the kind of option Rep. Dick Mallary and his wife Jean wanted for themselves and the reason for their passionate support of Patient Choices Vermont. Unfortunately, the law didn't pass in time for former Rep. Mallary. In September 2011, suffering from terminal pancreatic cancer, he chose to end his life. Without the protections afforded by the new Vermont law he was forced to die alone for fear his loved ones could be charged with a crime. Governor Shumlin's signature ensures terminally ill Vermonters  
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## Street, Syme Lead List of Speakers at 2013 AGM

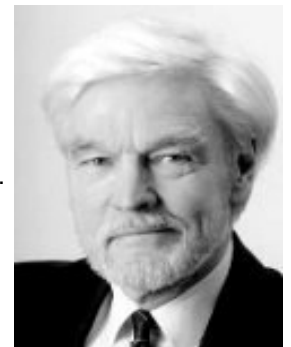
Yvonne Shaw

The Hon. Maryan Street and Dr. Rodney Syme FRACS were featured speakers at the 2013 VESNZ, Inc. AGM in Wellington on 8 June. Both spoke passionately of the importance of compassion at the end of life, and the need for measures to address issues not resolved through traditional palliative care. About 65 people attended the morning AGM, while about 100 attended the afternoon panel discussion.

Maryan discussed the points of her End-Of-Life Choice Bill, which would allow doctors to prescribe a lethal dose of medication to those with a terminal illness or irrecoverable condition, who request it and complete a qualification process. The Bill protects medical practitioners from prosecution while allowing patients to be in the presence of family and friends should they choose to hasten their death. She shared the story of meeting Don Grant and Yoka De Houwer in Nelson, and agreeing to support their request to sponsor the legislation. Yoka died of cancer in March. The Bill is in the ballot box, and could be drawn at any time.

Dr. Syme discussed his experience as a medical professional in an industry that does not support patients' autonomy at end-of-life. He shared compelling accounts of patients who requested assistance to hasten what would be a painful death. Dr. Syme worked tenaciously to provide relief to patients when traditional palliative methods were inadequate, especially in cases of nerve pain, bone pain and existential suffering.

The panel also included Dr. Libby Smales; Dr. Jack Havill; Yvonne Shaw, MPA; and The Very Rev. John Murray. Following Dr. Syme's presentation, attendees were allowed to ask questions from the floor. The event was a success, as declared by those who attended.



## A message from the President

Ms. Carole Sweney,  
President,  
End-Of-Life Choice

Dear Members,

As we head into another busy year, still awaiting the drawing of the End-of-Life Choice Bill from the ballot box, I'd like to thank all our members for their contributions to the growing profile of our message - choice at the end of life. Our committees work hard communicating with members and the public, at national and Branch level. Individual members have written articles and letters to the editors of newspapers and magazines. I encourage you all to continue to do this. While the campaign for legislation allowing assistance in dying could be categorised as human rights or personal autonomy or social responsibility, it is essentially a people's movement supporting a law change already accepted by most New Zealanders. The main thrust to our MPs needs to come from individuals in their

local electorate. When they have heard from thousands of New Zealanders supporting this Bill, they will know it's time to act. To talk to them you need to be informed, so read the content of the EOLC Bill, online or get a summary version through your Branch, and attend meetings to discuss the various clauses. If you've spoken with your MP, let your Branch committee know how it went. Most people expressing negative views about the Bill don't know or understand the provisions so let's ensure the facts are out there for full discussion and debate. The real debate will start when the End-of-Life Choice Bill is through the First Reading. Let's be ready for that event.

*Carole Sweney,*

*President EOLC*

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And  
Join the Conversation on Facebook! <http://www.facebook.com/groups/eolcnz>

### Vermont: Continued from Page 1

are able to die in the comfort of their own homes and say their final goodbyes to loved ones in a peaceful setting.

The new legislation in Vermont means that legislation in other jurisdictions may be easier to forward.

"As people become more familiar with the topic, and see options for end-of-life choices available in other areas, then conversations become more acceptable. Talking about what we want and need is the first step toward achieving it," said Yvonne Shaw of End-Of-Life Choice New Zealand. Shaw worked for Compassion of Oregon in America before coming to NZ to assist in the campaign. "Maryan Street's Bill includes safeguards used successfully in other jurisdictions."

This new law, and all of the information shared throughout the multi-year effort to pass it, has directly changed the conversation around death, dying, and assisted death. This is a giant step forward for the assisted dying movement. Lobbying groups Death with Dignity National Center (DDNC) and Patient Choices Vermont promoted the legislation. In New Zealand, End-of-Life Choice/The Voluntary Euthanasia Society promote legislation. For more information visit the VESNZ website, or Death with Dignity National Center (in America) website: [Deathwithdignity.org](http://Deathwithdignity.org).

**Volunteers Needed!** Do you have time to assist with the EOLC campaign? We are looking for three people in the Wellington/Lower Hutt area who can assist with data entry, mailings, office work, and local events. If this sounds like something you would like to do, then please contact Yvonne Shaw in the Central Office, at 04 938-0317 or via email [vesnz.yvonne@gmail.com](mailto:vesnz.yvonne@gmail.com)

From the time they recite the Hippocratic oath, medical practitioners are invested in the well-being of their patients. Historically that has included every attempt at a healing outcome, or if that is not possible, then comfort care at the end of life.

In his book, "A Good Death," Dr. Rodney Syme discusses medical advances over the past 20 years that have created a new paradigm in healthcare and modern medicine. Such advances have certainly extended both lives and the quality of those lives. At the same time, it brings a challenge in defining when life is being extended, and when death is being prolonged.

In the assisted dying debate, doctors have ground to gain and ground to lose. They stand to gain protections offered through legalization of assisted dying, as well as the ability to follow their patients' wishes in an environment of support and transparency. They stand to lose autonomy if they don't become involved in conversations around medical protocol, opting-in, and advance directives.

New Zealanders have indicated overwhelming support for assistance in achieving a peaceful death. Now is the time for those at the front lines of medical services to have a good think about how and when they want to become involved in the ultimate commitment to a patient's request: assistance in dying.

In jurisdictions where assisted dying is legal, participating doctors talk about the privilege and honour they feel assisting with this final request from patients they have tended through thick and thin. They feel safe in the medical protocols. They feel protected from prosecution.

The New Zealand medical community has an opportunity to join the conversation and shape the laws that may soon guide the parameters of patient care and quality of life in their practices. Who qualifies? What is the process? How are families supported? How are the rights of medical practitioners supported? All of these questions will need answers. We turn to the medical community for guidance in this important issue.

## Assisted Dying and End-Of-Life Choice in the Media

End-of-Life Choice and the topic of assisted dying had a media surge over the past week across the country. The Dominion Post featured Rodney Syme. And Radio NZ hosted a show featuring VESNZ President Carole Sweney; Palliative Care doctor Sinead Donnelly and Dr. Rodney Syme on Sunday 9 June. Others commented on the topic in other media. Visit [www.ves.org.nz](http://www.ves.org.nz) and click on Latest News to find these and other stories!

## Postal Voting Results for National Committee and Resolutions

Nine of the ten Resolutions passed. The resolution abolishing Newsletter Editor and Membership secretary failed. These positions therefore have been filled. Voters decided that the positions of ordinary 'elected members' will no longer be required but those appointed this year will remain on the National Committee until next year's AGM.

### Officers:

President: Carole Sweney (Kapiti-Horowhenua)

National Secretary: James Armour (Wellington)

Treasurer: Jan Rosie (Wellington)

National Membership Secretary: Ann David (Wellington)

Newsletter Editor: Roslyn Bullas (Wellington)

### Elected Members:

Kevin Brennan, Wellington

Tess Nesdale, Bay Of Plenty

Libby Smales, Wellington

Kevin Stone, Waikato

### Branch Representatives:

Suzy Austen, Wellington

Dr. Jack Havill, Waikato

Sara Heslop, Auckland

Sue Reynolds, Kapiti-Horowhenua

Des Vize, Bay of Plenty

Show your support for End-Of-Life Choice by writing to your MP.  
Share your story and make a difference.

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### Hawke's Bay:

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## Upcoming Events

**Auckland: Public Meeting** Friday 28 June, 2pm. Dr. Libby Smales, Palliative Care physician, in a talk entitled "Death is not the worst thing." Venue: Ellerslie War Memorial Community Centre, 138 Main Highway, Ellerslie.

**Bay of Plenty Branch Committee Meeting** Tuesday 18 June, 7-9pm. The Bay of Plenty Branch Committee meets on the third Tuesday of the month. This meeting is open to all BOP financial members. Tauranga Area meetings are held on the first Sunday of each month. Gold coin donation to cover costs of tea/coffee and biscuits. Venue: 7 First Avenue, Tauranga.

**Kapiti-Horowhenua:** To Be Announced

**Waikato: Branch meeting** CCS building, 17 Claudelands Road, Hamilton 30th June 2:00 PM. Public welcome.

**Meeting with Age Concern**, Celebrating Age Centre (Victoria St Hamilton) 9.30am Friday 19th July

**Wellington: AGM** Saturday, 27 July, Kilbirnie Community Centre, Bay Road, Kilbirnie 2:00-4:00

Dr. Libby Smales (Palliative Care) and Yvonne Shaw, MPA, will discuss the End-of-Life Choice Bill and what it means for New Zealanders. Yvonne will discuss her New Zealand experience as she has travelled discussing Oregon and Washington's legislation. All Members and Public Welcome. Will include election of new officers and representatives. If you are interested in becoming involved in the movement, then please come to this meeting. We are excited at the prospect of the Bill being drawn, and invite you to join us in our endeavors!

[Visit our website for the latest information and activities in your area](#)

## Canadians Considering Assisted Dying Legislation

Assisted dying legislation is on the table for government debate in Quebec. Bill 52, introduced by Social Services Minister Veronique Hivon on 12 June, would legalise assisted dying for the terminally ill.

Hivon, who received a standing ovation when she introduced her bill, said it would insure that those at end of life would receive autonomy and dignity. Quebec legislation mirrors legislation in Europe rather than legislation in America, in that it is an injection administered by a doctor rather than medication taken orally. It is intended for the small number of patients for whom palliative care is not sufficient, and doctor administration is intended to insure that no one dies alone.

The Toronto Star printed an opinion editorial on 15 June in support of Parliament sanctioning assisted dying and described it as "inspired by compassion."

"It rightly leaves physicians free to follow their conscience. And it ensures that people do not end their lives on a whim.

Legislators will decide at the Fall session. If it passes, doctors in Quebec will be allowed to administer a lethal dose of medication to terminal patients who request it. Canadian law already allows patients to refuse medical care through advance directives.