**EOLC/VES AGM 17 June 2017**

**PRESIDENT’S REPORT**

Kiaora koutou katoa.

Greetings to you all.

It is my pleasure to present the 2017 EOLC/VES AGM President’s Report.

It has been a year full of activity – some of it desirable and of our own making, and some of it less welcome but able to be turned to our advantage.

First however, I wish to thank all the Officers of our Society and the members of the National Committee who have supported me unfailingly over the course of the year. Jack Havill, as Immediate Past President and Carole Sweney as Secretary, have been towers of strength for me and I am very grateful to them for their work and their extensive experience and knowledge. Pete Cowley has been ready at all times as our Treasurer and our Administrator, to ensure that processes have moved efficiently and appropriately and Elizabeth Cronje as our Membership Secretary has kept constant tabs on our membership, including reminding people to renew their membership when it lapses without them knowing.

Our National Committee members too have been wonderful, constant volunteers who have taken on all kinds of activities from arranging public meetings, to envelope stuffing, fundraising and lobbying MPs – all to further our reach and support our cause. To them I am hugely grateful. Volunteering gets few extrinsic rewards, so I am grateful that they survive on intrinsic ones! I could not have done my work without all of theirs.

We have seen the constitutional changes of last year’s AGM bear fruit as Mary Panko now steps up into the new position of Vice-President. Thank you for that Mary – I look forward to working with you in that new position. And as a result of a further move at last year’s AGM, we now have a new name for our organisation, achieved after a year of debate, consultation and finally voting. We will be known from now on as the End of Life Choice Society (in brief). Thank you to all who participated in that debate from both sides of the discussion. The result of that vote was 477 in favour of the name change; 42 were opposed. All the thresholds required for the motion to pass were met.

The activity of our own making to which I referred includes the progress of our petition before the Health Select Committee of Parliament, the organisation of the speaking tour of Professor Jan Bernheim from Belgium and the commissioning of further polling to update our 2012 efforts. These have all had or will have substantial media coverage and public profile, to good advantage.

The Parliamentary Health Committee opened the petition hearing up to submitters last year, closing to new submissions at the end of March this year. There was an historical record number of submissions – nearly 22,000 in total. While that is an impressive register of public interest, it was never going to be about the numbers at that point of the process. It was always going to be about the quality and uniqueness of the deeply personal stories which were told to the various members of the committee. I want to put on record my heartfelt thanks to all those who steeled themselves to present deeply personal and often distressing accounts of what it means not to have a law permitting aid in dying. Your efforts were outstanding and helped to broadcast the issue into the regions and cities where the committee conducted hearings. At the point of writing, we are still awaiting the report of the Select Committee which I am sure will be delivered before the House rises in August at the end of the Parliamentary year. We await its deliberations and recommendations with a great deal of interest.

The visit of Prof Jan Bernheim has been a resounding success. He has spoken at public meetings in Tauranga, Hamilton, New Plymouth, Palmerston North, Napier, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch and today in Auckland. He has fielded Kim Hill and will appear on Q&A tomorrow. Importantly, he has also spoken to medical professionals in large numbers at Palmerston North, Napier and Wellington, which has been of particular benefit to us. His experience of aid in dying embedded within palliative care has been instructive for many and very helpful in refuting some of the baseless opposition of our opponents. He also met with a cross-party group of MPs at Parliament who found the Belgian experience much more persuasive when explained by a Belgian!

The results of the Horizon polling conducted last month have been gratifying. Support for medically assisted dying in 2012 was 63%. Last month’s poll shows that support, in the case of terminal illness, has risen to 76%. In the additional case of irreversible or unbearable suffering, the level of support is 66%. 72% of the poll supported legally binding Advance Directives in either case (terminal illness or unbearable suffering) where the person has ceased to be mentally competent. Interestingly, in the case of legalising Advance Directives made while competent, for those now suffering from severely advanced dementia, support was recorded at 67%. These results will be made public very shortly.

I now turn to the activity which we did not precipitate, but which has ended up working in our favour and that is the Police’s efforts in Operation Painter. When a bogus breath-testing stop was erected in Lower Hutt in October last year with the purpose of identifying people coming away from an Exit meeting, some of whom were also members of our society, I immediately lodged a complaint with the Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA). I was, by a small margin, beaten to the punch by the Police themselves who realised they needed to engage in damage control for what was both illegal and intimidating behaviour. We then agreed to merge that complaint with one to the Privacy Commissioner and allow them to investigate both complaints together. We are still awaiting that report although I believe it is imminent. The trial of Suzy Austen, a much loved member of ours, will proceed later this year and expose yet again the injustice of the current law. We did however see a marked pick up in memberships happen in October last year, after the Police campaign – between the beginning of October and the end of December last year, we gained 82 new members!

Finally, just 10 days ago, David Seymour’s End of Life Choice Bill was unexpectedly drawn from the Parliamentary ballot. This was very good news for us and will make our issue an election issue, but one which we will probably have to wait for the incoming government to include in the Reinstatement motion and the new Parliament to pick up. It is highly likely that 2019 will be our campaign year and the year when we could finally get the kind of law reform we are seeking.

Our cause has only gained in strength through all of these activities. Thank you for all your constant activism over the last year. I look forward to another active and ultimately successful year next year.



**MARYAN STREET**

**PRESIDENT**