

**SUBMISSION BY GEOFFREY WILLIAMS TO VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO END  
OF LIFE CHOICES**

15 June 2015

I am a 58 year old retired accountant. I regularly attend my local Anglican Church, and I am a member of Dying With Dignity NSW, the Voluntary Euthanasia Party (NSW) and Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia. I stood as a candidate for the Voluntary Euthanasia Party in the recent NSW elections in March.

Many years ago, my mother said: "Hit me on the head if I ever get dementia, won't you?!" Sadly, she is now suffering from Alzheimer's Disease, the very fate worse than death that she most feared. She was diagnosed over ten years ago, and now simply exists. She does not know anybody, or understand what is happening around her. Prior to being admitted into a dementia-specific aged care facility in August 2009, she was often heard by my father to mutter: "God, take me now!" but sadly her plea was not answered... She is now 89.

About 25 years ago, her life was saved by a surgeon who operated to remove Cervical Cancer. Had it not been for medical intervention at that time, she would not have lived long enough to suffer from Alzheimer's Disease. I'm pleased that Medical Science was able to save her life then, but I cannot understand why our legal system prohibits willing doctors from assisting their patients (at their own request, of course) to die with dignity when the alternative is a horrible End of Life existence.

I appreciate that procedures to allow for dementia patients to be given access to medical assistance in dying are complicated. It is my strong belief that dementia patients should be allowed access to medical assistance between the time of their diagnosis and the time that they lose their mental / legal competence to request it. In my mother's case, I contend that such a time would have been early in 2009 when she was able to understand her predicament and mutter the quiet phrase/prayer: "God take me now!". I have no doubt whatever that my mother would have requested medical assistance to die at that time if it had been legally available. Instead, she has lingered for years in a haze of confusion.

I now turn my attention to reasons why the law in Victoria needs to be changed to allow a medically assisted death to be one of the options in a dying patient's own 'End of Life choices', ideally as an additional choice as part of good palliative care. This is exactly the situation now in Belgium.

I cannot understand why a doctor can put a patient into a coma, as a last resort of palliative care, with the intention of relieving pain, but cannot provide a 'bolus' dose of the same medication to the same patient with the intention of ending suffering when the patient has requested/begged for medical assistance to die.

**SUBMISSION BY GEOFFREY WILLIAMS TO VICTORIAN PARLIAMENTARY INQUIRY INTO END  
OF LIFE CHOICES**

Currently in Australia, a doctor only has to state that the intention of providing terminal sedation is to relieve suffering, “making the patient comfortable” and death can be hastened and indeed is inevitable from starvation or dehydration even if that patient has not requested assistance to die. This situation is absurd!

I can see no legal or ethical difference between Terminal Sedation and Voluntary Euthanasia. The only difference is that Terminal Sedation is completely legal, but much slower, as patients may have to suffer while the dosage is gradually increased to ensure that the dosage itself does not immediately end a patient’s life. This is legal, but sadistic. It would be much more compassionate and merciful to allow a patient to request their life be ended quickly and with dignity, while the patient is still lucid enough to say goodbye to family and friends.

The introduction of legislation to permit medical assistance in dying will not impose in any way upon the lives of those who oppose such legislation. It will not impact upon the lives of such vulnerable people as the aged and disabled, unless they meet the criteria carefully established in any proposed legislation and request assistance to die with dignity. However, any continued opposition to VE legislation DOES impact mightily on the lives of those poor souls who desperately need the right to die in peace with dignity. Church leaders who are often the loudest opponents of VE are more intent on adhering to their religious dogma, and less interested in showing love and compassion for the truly vulnerable in our society - those proportionately few terminally ill patients for whom palliative care does not ease the pain.

I respect the right of people to disagree with my point of view, and I politely request that opponents of VE equally respect the genuinely-held opinions of the majority of voters who support the introduction of VE legislation.

Not to heed the wishes of the majority of Australian voters would be, quite simply, UNDEMOCRATIC!

It is my mother’s predicament which has persuaded me to become active in the political process to introduce VE legislation. It doesn’t seem fair that patients in a growing number of jurisdictions overseas are able to request medical assistance to die, but all Australians are currently denied the basic human right of choosing the manner of our own deaths. This Victorian Inquiry on ‘End of Life Choices’ provides the ideal opportunity for all political parties in the Victorian Parliament to work together to introduce and then to enact compassionate legislation for the terminally and hopelessly ill.

Yours faithfully,

***Geoffrey Kerr Williams***