

Legislative Council Standing Committee on Legal and Social Issues

INQUIRY INTO END OF LIFE CHOICES

“Are Victorian Laws adequately meeting people’s expectations regarding medical options available at the end of their life?”

Dad passed away on the 6th June this year while in Calvary Health Care Bethlehem. The staff had been terrific with community visits to the home by some wonderful nurses.

But towards the end of his life he only had one choice. Starvation and dehydration. It wasn’t too difficult for him to go down that route because he couldn’t swallow. He had squamous cancer which had spread to his throat and the year before he had had a massive operation to remove the squamous from his ear area. He had the whole right ear removed as well as a lot of surrounding tissue and flesh and a massive graft from his thigh.

But Dad was stoic. He never complained about pain but he was in pain from all the nerve damage resulting from that operation. During one of the visits from the community care nurse he admitted that the pain was 4 out of 10 so that would have been anyone else’s 8.

He was drinking soups and vitamised food through a straw but eventually he was bringing everything up as the valve in his throat wasn’t working and the food was going down the wrong way. He had lost massive amounts of weight and I will attach a couple of photos for you. 1 taken 3 years ago at Christmas to show you what a jolly rotund fellow he was, and another taken this year in April and you can see the weight loss. My sister took another photo the day before he died which is very confronting. Unfortunately the quality is not good as it was taken on her phone but I will endeavour to forward it to you at a later date.

In the last week of his life while he still at home the pain increased and he was administered a “driver” which was constantly delivering morphine to his system. For about 3 months prior to this Dad had trouble sleeping and was taking sleeping pills for the first time in his life. He also was very constipated and was taking medication for that as well.

On Thursday the 4th June Dad was taken by ambulance to the Bethlehem hospital. He was in massive pain and told me that it was at “9”. On arrival I had to answer a lot of administrative questions but all I was concerned about was that Dad could receive a pain killing injection. Eventually this was administered but took a long time to kick in. He was writhing in pain. A sedative was also administered.

On the Friday, the day before he died, the whole family was there including wife, daughters, son in law, and grand-children. Dad was in a lot of pain and extremely uncomfortable because he was now skin and bone and his bottom bone was hurting. He was receiving enemas but they were not working. He didn’t really want everyone there and scribbled a message saying as much in an exercise book. One of his grandchildren read a card to him that she had written and told him that she loved him. He just looked at her and said “I want to die”.

It would have been perfect if we could have had the option then to say. "OK It's time." We were all there. Dad had had enough. We could have all said goodbye and then left my mother with Dad for the final moments.

As it turned out Dad "lived" for another 30 hours. His heart was so strong that one of the doctors said he could go on for another week – which on reflection was a pretty crazy thing to say.

Everyone was exhausted at the end. We were all trying our best but when Dad finally passed away while in a deep morphine and sedative induced sleep. I was the only one with him. It was a glorious moment. He was finally finished with the suffering. But unfortunately this started a great family fallout because my mother wasn't with him when he died even though she was staying in the family room in the hospital.

We weren't to know when he would go. It was all an unknown quantity but it could have been so much better if we could have ALL had a chance to say goodbye and then leave him and my mother together at the end.

PLEASE CHANGE THE LAWS : and change end of life choices to include voluntary euthanasia .

Yours Sincerely,

Fiona Boyd.

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]



