

My submission into “End of Life Choices” is based on my long held belief that doctor-assisted voluntary euthanasia must be legalised. Present Victorian law is totally inadequate to meet one’s desire to have any control over end of life choice.

#### Term of Reference 1 – Assess current practices

My husband of 63 years (aged 86) died last month of metastatic squamous skin cancer. He had suffered severe, lengthy and disfiguring operations ( 12 and 13 hours duration) and years of removal of skin cancers followed by skin grafts which did not always heal successfully. The last of these severe operations, (May 2014) resulted in the loss of his right ear, jaw bone joint, facial muscles, (3 internal “slings” in face to hold mouth in place), eye injury, paralysed vocal chords, and in the last couple of months, the inability to swallow anything, (except through fine straw), nausea, vomiting and sleeplessness, nor could he speak without difficulty. He received excellent palliative home care visits by supportive nursing staff, but only wished to end his pain and suffering. The only means to achieve this end was refusal of all artificial feeding, and undergo powerful increases in sedation until death. It is ironical, if not downright hypocritical, that the medical profession can increase sedation and painkillers, knowing that death will result, but these “unnatural” deaths are not reportable as such.

He was admitted to palliative care hospital 2 days before death. To watch the suffering of this stoic, formerly fit, active man lose nearly 30 kgs. in weight, longing for an end, was heartbreaking. Although his end of life choice, (starvation) was supported by the hospital palliative care staff, his suffering could have ended much earlier, at his earnest request, by legal, doctor-assisted, VOLUNTARY euthanasia.

#### Term of reference 2 – Current legislation in Australian and overseas

Voluntary euthanasia organisations are active in all states, and in Tasmania in 2013 Parliament came close to passing an Act but it was narrowly defeated, 13 to 12. However in 1995 when the Northern Territory twice passed the Right of Terminally Ill Act, the Commonwealth Liberal government, under a private member’s bill from Kevin Andrews, overturned all Territories rights to enact this legislation. It seemed to me at the time that the beliefs of one person was able to override the wishes of Australian territories. Several European countries have enacted legislation to give terminally ill patients the right of end of life choices and this legislation should be properly investigated by any Australian government authority wishing to enact similar, civilised legislation.

### Term of Reference 3 - Type of legislation required

As previously mentioned, the most humane, civilised way to provide terminally ill people with an real, peaceful end of life choice, is by doctor-assisted medication when the patient has made his or her wishes clear to all, and by medical directive.

In 1997 the State of Oregon in the USA enacted the Death with Dignity Act whereby the terminally ill patient could voluntarily self-administer lethal medication prescribed for that purpose by his or her medical professional.

To be enacted either by States or Federally in Australia this ideal legislation giving a patient a REAL choice should, in theory, have no difficulty being passed, since survey after survey discloses that at least 85% of the population approve of end of life choices. Perhaps a referendum would be a good indication of the will of the people and encourage government to proceed, but until then many people will suffer unnecessarily painful and miserable deaths.

I do not wish to speak at the committee hearings, but would very much like to attend, if possible. I am 84 years old, and in reasonably good health. If I live long enough to see humane legislation introduced in Victoria and Australia I will be delighted. My thanks to the proposers of this enquiry into “End of Life Choices”.

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