

Submission: Inquiry into End of Life Issues**Rosmarie Speidel,** [REDACTED]

I greatly value the opportunity to make a submission to the inquiry into end of life issues.

As Australia's population is ageing, the number of residents facing a life limiting illness will be expanding significantly.

We are fortunate that Palliative Care Services have been expanding to assist the growing number of people who are faced with terminal illness. Still not all Victorians are able to access palliative care in a setting of their preference or are not given timely advice that their illness is terminal and as a consequence, many people are faced with invasive medical treatments which are futile.

I recommend that

- Palliative Care Services be expanded significantly to ensure all Victorian's with a life limiting illness will have access to appropriate palliative care services in the setting of their choice: their home, in an aged care facility or in a medical setting;
- Continued education of health professionals to ensure that patients are given information, advice and are referred to in a timely manner to palliative care services to reduce futile and distressing medical treatment at the end of a patient's life;
- Implement professional development training to ensure all health professionals have the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours appropriate to provide end of life care;
- Continue and expand community education and awareness raising of "having conversations about end of life" to increase the number of people with advanced care plans.
- Continue and expand education of health professionals and implement policy and procedures and benchmarks to ensure health professionals are aware of and adhere to the wishes expressed in advance care plans.
- Implement an independent complaints system to ensure that relatives or patients can complain in a timely manner when their wishes in an advanced care plans are not respected. The complaints should be used to improve practice and address barriers to patient centred care for terminally ill patients.

Despite improvements in Palliative Care services, too many people are experiencing pain at their end of life which cannot be managed by drugs, they are distressed or faced with indignity to an extent which is unacceptable to the person.

Therefore I strongly support changes which makes it legal for

A medical practitioner to assist a terminal ill person to end his or her life in a humane manner including

- A) giving information to a person
- b) prescribing of a substance to the person
- c) preparation of a substance for the person
- d) giving of a substance to the person for self-administration
- e) the administration of a substance to the person at the person's request

I support the inclusion of safe guards including:

Pre-conditions to providing dying with dignity medical services

- (a) the person is at least 18 years of age;
- (b) the person is an Australian resident; a
- (c) the medical practitioner is satisfied, on reasonable grounds, that the person is suffering from a terminal illness; and in reasonable medical judgement, there is no medical measure acceptable to the person that can reasonably be undertaken in the hope of effecting a cure;

It is interesting to note that countries where it is legal to provide medical support to a person with a terminal illness to end their life, the number of people actually choosing to terminate their life is stable. Evidence suggests that having this option relieves fear and anxiety and improves the quality of life at people's end of life.

Therefore

improving access to quality palliative care
 increasing the number of people with advanced care plans
 improving the skills of people providing end of life care
 reducing futile treatments at the end of life which increase suffering
 legal changes to allow medical assisted dying with dignity for people faced with terminal illness to provide relief from intolerable suffering

are the package of measures needed to improve the quality of end of life care in Victorian and in Australia.