Submission to Inquiry into End of Life Choices

I thank the Victorian Government for establishing this Committee Inquiry. I have long been an admirer of this State for its history of progressive law reform, including in the area of decriminalisation of abortion services.

Reading Submission 148 by Terri Eskdale two days ago made me weep afresh for my older sister. She became my responsibility, with her financial power of attorney, when she was moved to live in a Canberra nursing home near me then, at the age of 47 due to the slow progression of her multiple sclerosis. She was resuscitated four times during the 11 years she lived in three nursing homes before she was allowed to die, just after her 61st birthday. I first became a member of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society of NSW in about 1991, due to my need to understand end of life choices for myself, not having any children of my own. I have been an active member since, making my first submission on this subject to the NT Parliament, followed by submissions to the ACT, Federal Government, and NSW over the years.

Term of Reference 1. I also read the submission to this Inquiry from Doctors for Voluntary Euthanasia Choice two days ago, because my partner is one of its signatories. I note that it says “a few medical practitioners do agree with a patient’s rational request to end suffering by administering drugs in sufficient concentration to control symptoms by the ending of the patient’s life. This practice requires both subterfuge and personal courage on behalf of the practitioner; it persists in the face of its illegality because it has ethical impetus, a feature to which current laws are blind.”

I believe that people should be able to exercise freely their preferences for the way they want to manage their end of life, including the option for assisted death wherever excellent palliative care services are not available, or do not alleviate their suffering adequately. Health and allied health professionals willing to assisting death humanely should not be prosecuted for such compassionate assistance.

Term of Reference 2. While there is no jurisdiction in Australia that presently has laws that I, and many others, consider are needed, there is plenty of evidence from other jurisdictions overseas to show that legal reform has, with sufficient safeguards, provided comfort at the end of life. The prime example is in Oregon, USA, which has been a model for many other jurisdictions. [http://www.deathwithdignity.org/access-acts](http://www.deathwithdignity.org/access-acts)

A different model, which is also attractive to me, is that of Dignitas in Zurich, Switzerland, where such assistance is provided by specially trained non-medical staff who are able to
document that the death is achieved in a way that is legally supervised and reported to the
authorities. Dignitas is the only legitimate service for non-residents as well as Swiss citizens,
but it is presently inaccessible to all but the wealthiest Australians. I have personally heard
from the widow of someone who took her dying husband there at an earlier VES (NSW)
meeting. http://www.dignitas.ch/?lang=en Of course I have also seen the wonderful

Term of Reference 3. I hope Victoria will take the lead in law reform in this area, and
authorise a much-needed service like Dignitas for all Australians who feel the need for it at
the end of their lives, and cannot access it where they currently reside. It will provide us
with the reassurance we all want, that while death is inevitable, suffering is not.

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