

act branch news

No harm to others: *my life, my dying*

Voluntary Euthanasia Society of NSW (From the ACT Branch)

Vol. 4, No. 2, July 2009

Next General Meeting

Thursday, **13 August**, at 2 pm.
The Irish Club,
6 Parkinson Street, Weston.

The invited speaker will be:

Martin Thomas
Policy and Sector Development Manager
ACT Mental Health Community Coalition.

Martin has been active on the legislative side of mental health in the ACT. There is considerable common interest with our (VES) concerns for individual autonomy and dignity, guardianship, and a national approach to matters such as Health Directions/Advance Directives. Martin will address such common interests.

As usual, there will be scope for discussion and questions to the speaker at the meeting, and a more informal get-together over coffee/tea after the meeting.

The Annual General Meeting will be held on 19 November, also at The Irish Club. As in 2008, this will be the occasion for members to raise matters of interest and there will be general discussion, after reports and election of committee for 2010.

PUT THE DATE IN YOUR DIARIES!

Program of meetings 2010

Our decision to hold four general meetings in 2009 instead of three has thrown our program out of kilter with the VESNSW newsletter schedule, making it more difficult to get timely information to our members. One of the items for discussion at the AGM in November will be the form of the 2010 program.

Previous General Meeting, May 21.

Our speaker was Brian McLeod, Deputy Public Advocate of the ACT, who gave an informative and well presented talk on 'Autonomy of choice in health and associated matters'. He discussed enduring power of attorney and the making of wills, and distributed updated booklets on 'The Power to Choose'. Copies of this booklet are available at the office of the ACT Public Advocate, 12 Moore Street, Canberra City, or from their web site.

The committee has met twice since the last general meeting and has discussed various activities to further our cause. We continue to keep up-to-date with initiatives and events nationally and internationally, and are grateful to individual members who report items to us. There is a lot of activity in the VE area now, and much more open public discussion than previously.

Three members of the committee met with Amanda Bresnan, ACT MLA and Greens spokesperson for Health and Ageing. Ms Bresnan showed positive interest and asked for further details on some of the matters which we raised (e.g. surveys showing widespread support for improved legislation on VE).

One of us attended the recent forum of the ACT Mental Health Community Coalition to hear reports on the Review of the ACT Mental Health Act. One of the options being considered is capacity-based legislation rather than the current risk-based system.

Committee:

Jeanne Arthur, arthur@vesnsw.org.au, Secretary;
John Brook, Thelma Hunter, Darrel Killen, Clive Monty,
Barbara Mummery, Treasurer;
Beryl Rawson, rawson@vesnsw.org.au, newsletter editor

Legislation of interest

We still await the next introduction into the Australian Senate of Senator Bob Brown’s Bill on Restoring Territory Rights. It will be important to press local MPs and leaders of major parties to allow a conscience vote when this bill comes forward.

In Tasmania a private member’s Dying with Dignity Bill has been introduced, and in SA there is a similar Bill before Parliament. In Victoria, the *Medical Treatment (Physician Assisted Dying) Bill 2008* was defeated last year.

Palliative Care

The recent Palliative Care Week raised much discussion, including sometimes the relationship between palliative care and voluntary euthanasia. The best contributions recognised that there was no necessary conflict between these: they were both possible stages along the end-of-life path. An excellent discussion was broadcast on ABC Radio National on May 27 (repeated May 31). It honoured Cicely Saunders, considered the founder of modern palliative care. Professor David Clark, Director of the International Observatory on End-of-Life Care at Lancaster University in the UK, is writing her biography. He argued against the need for any ‘adversarial’ relationship between palliative care and voluntary euthanasia. He cited Holland, Belgium, and Oregon (USA), where some form of assisted dying has been legalised but there has been no ‘slippery slope’ and no inhibition of the development of palliative care. He argued, ‘... it’s time for more dialogue between the two worlds of palliative care and the protagonists of euthanasia, because the loggerheads that they’ve been at over a number of years now don’t really help to advance the debate, and I don’t think resonate very well with the feelings and the beliefs and the attitudes that exist within the wider society’.

In the ACT there is some concern at the proposal to sell the government-owned land and hospice building (Clare Holland House) to the Little Company of Mary, which has until now managed the hospice (with a very high reputation). The ACT Palliative Care Society has expressed concern about possible changes to the provision of palliative care to the ACT and surrounding region.

The Christian basis of much palliative care has, in the past, meant opposition to the legalising of voluntary euthanasia. But there are signs of some modification in this stance. Note the formation in South Australia of Christians for Voluntary Euthanasia. This group is prepared to involve interstate members. Thanks to Sheila Keunen for details on this.

Doctors’ groups

Recent elections have resulted in a new President and a largely new committee for the Australian Medical Association (AMA). Several state VE societies have suggested that this might be the time for a new approach to the AMA for at least a neutrality stance on voluntary euthanasia.

There have been similar moves in the UK recently to approach the BMA.

Members’ contact details

In connection with the May meeting, we tried to make individual contact with members who had provided e-mail addresses, but a great number of these messages ‘bounced’.

We recognise that members often change their e-mail addresses, and, less frequently, postal addresses. We would be grateful to have you update your contact details. We will invite you to do this at the next general meeting, but there is also a form at the end of this newsletter on which you can enter details and which you can send to the Secretary. Or let us have the details by phone. Many thanks! We do want to keep in touch with you.

Any member who would like to suggest items for the ACT newsletter is invited to contact the editor or other members of the committee (contact details above).

CONTACT DETAILS

If you have changed your e-mail or postal address or phone number during the last year, please send updated details to the Secretary.

NAME:

NEW DETAILS:.....

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