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President's Message

THESE ARE EXCITING TIMES. Earlier this year, a professional survey conducted by Newspoll found that 80% of Australians are in favour of physician-assisted dying (PAD). Our own polls of Victorian politicians show that around 75% are in favour of our Legislative Charter for reform.

In June, hundreds of supporters rallied on the steps of Parliament in honour of Steve Guest who died on his own terms after suffering terribly from oesophageal cancer.

At the rally, several Victorian politicians spoke in support of reform, and stepped up to the plate to co-sponsor a Private Member's Bill, which we expect should hit Parliament

in the first half of next year.

Additionally, new, thorough reports on the practice of PAD in both Oregon in the USA and in the Netherlands has conclusively shown that there is no "slippery slope" or "avalanche" of assisted deaths in those two jurisdictions, where PAD is legal, refuting the claimed fears of opponents.

These are terrific steps forward in the road to legal dying with dignity.

Opponents will be ever more vociferous in their undermining of reform as it comes closer to fruition, so we must be sure to keep up our considerable efforts for the cause.

Neil Francis

Nitschke To Stand in Federal Election

With the Federal election due to be held later this year, Exit International Director Dr Philip Nitschke has announced his intention to stand as an Independent candidate against the sitting Liberal Member Kevin Andrews in the Victorian seat of Menzies. It was Kevin Andrews' Private Member's Bill—supported by many on both sides of parliament—that led to the overturning of the Northern Territory's *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act* in 1997.

Nitschke has twice challenged Andrews. In the first campaign as an Independent in Menzies in 1998, Nitschke attracted nearly 10% of the primary vote and forced Andrews to preferences for the first time. Donations to the campaign from VE supporters across Australia were in the order of \$120,000, more than any other independent candidate in the election.

In 2001, Nitschke again challenged Andrews, although he didn't stand as a candidate. The campaign was titled "Put Kevin Andrews Last" and set out to remind voters of Andrews' profoundly undemocratic Pri-

vate Member's Bill and his bellicose opposition to self-determination.

In this 10th anniversary year of the overturning of the world's first VE law, it is considered timely for Nitschke to stand again. Given the continuing poor polling of the

Howard government, Andrews is at serious risk of losing his seat.

However, there seems to be equally little chance of the Labor Party addressing VE law reform if it wins office. A number of senior ALP politicians like Tony Burke (who, with Andrews orchestrated the "Euthanasia No" campaign in 1996), and a number of others including Peter Garrett, hold anti-choice views.

Now is the best time ever for a candidate with pro-choice views to represent Australians in the Federal Parliament.

DWDV encourages you to consider throwing your support behind Dr Nitschke. It is only when you take action that you can expect the world to change. Use the flyer included with this newsletter to offer your help. (Authorised by Lindy Boyd, 8 Burnside Ave, Canterbury 3126.)



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Dr Philip Nitschke.

From & far near

DWDV Petition Tabled!

Deputy Premier John Thwaites tabled the DWDV Petition to the Legislative Assembly last month. The petition calls on the Assembly to enact physician assisted dying (PAD) law reform.

Thanks to the magnificent efforts of DWDV members and supporters, it was one of the largest petitions ever tabled in the house. This is a clear message to Parliament to *get on with it*.

Inter-State Meetings

DWDV Committee members Dr Max Sutherland and Neil Francis recently had the opportunity to meet with the VESQ Committee (see pic below). They also met with John Edge of the Gold Coast chapter, and Bryan Milner of VENS—Northern Rivers Branch. The series of meetings proved a fertile ground for sharing views, approaches and for coordinating efforts.

West Australia Moves

Western Australia Health Minister Jim McGinty says Parliamentary debate on living wills will resume shortly. He expects the bill to become law by Christmas this year.

Anglican Priest Cleared

A retired Anglican priest in Canada has been cleared of assisted suicide charges after accompanying his wife to Dignitas in Switzerland where she ended her life after suffering extreme multiple sclerosis for years.

Eric McDonald was under investigation after the Ontario Euthanasia Prevention Coalition complained to authorities. He later said, "I think the people that make up the suicide prevention

group are a bunch of fundamentalist busybodies ... pretending to know God's will or anything about compassion for the dying."

Dignitas Forced To Move

Dignitas in Zurich has been ordered to relocate after neighbours complained to the authorities that they have been surrounded by death for years.

DWDV welcomes the move and believes that PAD services are best conducted away from residential areas.

Kevorkian Released

Convicted PAD doctor Jack Kevorkian was recently paroled from eight years of prison. He has embarked on a lecture circuit to continue promoting PAD reform, and says he will be sticking within the law this time (or he violates his parole conditions).

No "Slippery Slope"

Professional studies recently completed have found no PAD "slippery slope" in either Oregon or the Netherlands. Reports for both jurisdictions clearly demonstrate restraint, with no "avalanche" of suicides simply because PAD is available, as claimed by opponents of PAD.

Palliative Care No Panacea

A recent Canadian study has found that 25% of terminal stage cancer sufferers suffer significantly despite the best palliative care available, confirming results of earlier surveys.

This flies in the face of PAD opponents claiming palliative care provides all necessary relief.

More news at www.dwdv.org.au/news



Have the Chinese accidentally stumbled on a novel method of self-deliverance?

New Petition

Keep those *new* petition forms to the Legislative Council coming in! For a signature to be valid, it must:

- Include name, address & signature.
- Be on a form including the full statement to the Council at the top of the page (as per DWDV copy).
- Have no extraneous material printed on either side of the sheet.

Please post originals to the office.

Open Garden

Olga Hilton cordially invites you to her unique Melton garden. Experience spring in splendour, including a sausage sizzle, a classic cars display and back copies of gardening magazines.



Photo courtesy of Newspix / Travis McCue

Entry \$5 per person (under 15 free)
Proceeds go to The Rotary Foundation and DWDV.

10am–4pm, Sunday 11 November 2007
10 Greenstead Amble, Kurunjang.
Melways map 337 B4
Put it in your diary now!



DWDV Committee members Dr Max Sutherland and Neil Francis (1st and 3rd on left) meet with the VESQ Committee (from second-left) John Todd, Margaret Anderson, Mary Mannison, Nick Bonne, Bob Stillaway and Sandra Milne.

Hundreds Attend Steve Guest Day Rally



DWDV's rally on the steps of Parliament House on Wednesday 20 June drew hundreds of supporters demanding law form for dying with dignity in Victoria. The rally commemorated the second anniversary of the death of Steve Guest, a journalist and former media advisor to the Cain Labor Government.

Steve Guest ended his own life two years ago after courageously sharing his intense suffering—from inoperable cancer of the oesophagus—with listeners on the ABC 774 Jon Faine radio programme. On air, he railed against those who would deny him the right to die his way and condemned those who preferred to see him die an agonisingly slow and painful death.

Speaking at the rally, Dr Rodney Syme, Vice President of DWDV, said that he had provided Guest with medication and challenged the Victorian Parliament to get on with enacting legislation to enable doctors to respond to the requests of people like Guest.

Andrew Guest, brother of Steve, gave a loving tribute to Steve's life. He courageously shared his experience of Steve's dying process, and expressed deep gratitude for Steve eventually being able to end his life peacefully and on his own terms at home with his family.

The rally drew cross-party support from current Parliament members.

Maxine Morand, a former nurse and current Labor member for Mount Waverley, described her own experiences with the dying and outlined her support for legislative reform.

Ken Smith gave an inspired and im-

passioned address on how so many members of his own extended family had suffered so badly at the end of life, a situation he didn't want repeated for any other Victorians.

Smith outlined his specific support for the DWDV Legislative Charter approach as a robust foundation for reform, and stated he wanted to sponsor a Private Member's Bill (PMB).

Greens member for Western Metropolitan, Colleen Hartland, also spoke of the unnecessary and unwelcome grief and suffering she had seen, and announced support for the Private Member's Bill.

Terry Lane delivered a spirited argument about the morality of people who wanted others to suffer against their wishes, and to deny self-determination.

Neil Francis, rally MC and DWDV President, read out several statements of support, including from media identity Phillip Adams.

He noted that Young Labor and Young Liberals tabled a Dying With Dignity bill in Youth Parliament last year. Youth Parliament is held in the parliamentary Houses, and debate is conducted strictly according to House rules—great practice for up and coming parliamentarians. After due debate, the bill was passed. Debate by young Victorians demonstrates that dying with dignity is an issue of interest to the whole community and not just to elderly Australians.

Late news: Sadly, with Maxine Morand's recent promotion to the cabinet, she is no longer able to co-sponsor a PMB, as ministers are denied this privilege. However, Smith and Hartland will continue to pursue the PMB.



Supporters honour the memory of Steve Guest.
Photo courtesy Herbert Osner



From top left: Hundreds of supporters, Dr Rodney Syme, Andrew Guest, Maxine Morand, Ken Smith, Colleen Hartland, Terry Lane.

Elections Looming

A message from Senator Lyn Allison

The Democrats strongly support DWDV's Legislative Charter. In fact we made it central to our policy at the last state election and now federally.

For the many people who want the right to choose to die in a manner acceptable to them and not be compelled to suffer beyond their wishes an unpleasant death, this charter is the answer.

How wonderful it would be for Victoria to lead the other states in nation-wide reform of our outdated laws where every day, doctors, in assisting their terminally ill patients, risk prosecution and heavy pen-



alties and every day patients in hospital beg for no medical intervention but then have it imposed anyway.

Congratulations to DWDV. We look forward to joining you in this campaign.

Senator Lyn Allison

Federal Election

You will be aware that a Federal election is due to be held some time over the coming months. DWDV will be working to determine the position of Victorian candidates for the federal election, towards its Legislative Charter for reform, to help you reach an informed decision.

State By-Elections

Since former Premier Steve Bracks and Deputy Premier John Thwaites resigned from Parlia-

ment recently, the Victorian seats of Williamstown and Albert Park are due for by-elections.

Watch the DWDV web site for information about candidates' positions on DWDV's legislative charter; information you may use to help decide which way you will cast your vote if you live in either of these electorates.



DWDV is not aligned with any individual political party, and encourages you to consider lending your support to election candidates who are clearly in favour of DWDV's Legislative Charter.

At the time of printing, the Democrats are the only party with an official supportive policy platform on the DWDV Legislative Charter, which means *all* their candidates are automatically in support.

Watch our website over the coming months for candidate information...

DWDV Continues Serving the Community

During the last 12 months, DWDV has been very active behind the scenes with educational and advocacy.

We have held 11 workshops, 8 in Malvern, and one each in Ballarat, Geelong and Kooweerup. Educational talks have been provided to 11 U3A groups around Melbourne. These are usually via an invitation arranged by one of our members, and they are an excellent way of spreading our message and increasing our membership.

Thanks to the work of Committee member Mike Tinsley, we have had in-

creasing opportunities to speak to groups in retirement villages, too. We have been to Long Island, Taylors Lakes and Phoenix East Malvern, and have bookings for Bundoora, Donvale and Greenways.

Other talks to community groups have been to the Stonnington over 50s, Heathmont Probus, Learning Guild, Brighton ALP, and the Readings Bioethics group in Hawthorn. An extensive session was held with nursing students from the Goulburn TAFE.

DWDV was also well represented in the media with articles from Committee

members, which gave many DWDV members the opportunity to respond brilliantly. Radio opportunities were taken with Derryn Hinch (3AW), Lindy Burns and Jon Faine (ABC 774), and on television on the SBS Insight program. The SBS documentary *Not For Resuscitation* was heavily supported by DWDV.

We continue to participate in the Advanced Planning Advisory Group which will be making recommendations to the State Health Minister Daniel Andrews around mid next year. Recommendations are likely to include law reform to recognise living wills.

Carry Critical Documents in Your Wallet

Some members recently brought to our attention that there are now credit-card-sized USB cards available. (USB is a type of connector plug that all computers made since 2000 have. Your mouse is probably plugged into one.) The first on the market is a 2Gb card from Freecom. It's also the only one that has an inbuilt USB connector that doesn't "stick out". Rather, it's built into the card itself so it's not likely to snap off as you carry it in your wallet.

So now you can carry around full copies of your Enduring Medical Power of Attorney, your Refusal of Medical Treatment Certificate, your Advance Directive (Living Will) and all kinds of other documents in your wallet, where they can be found and retrieved in any emergency.

Because of the high storage capacity, you can carry around electronic copies of family photographs and other valuable files as well.

For more information call Australian distributor eXpansys on (03) 8415 0848, or visit www.freecom.com.au.

Thanks to our members for bringing this to our attention. Got a tip of your own? Tell us.



Share your story

I found my 96 year old mother on a Monday morning having had a stroke some time during the previous night. She was paralysed on the right side, could not speak or swallow and had lost control of her bodily functions. She could only communicate to some degree by hand pressure although it was uncertain how much she understood.

I called the ambulance who took her to hospital where it was confirmed by scans that she had had a major stroke. The medical opinion was that she would probably die in the next few days either from coning, i.e. brain swelling, or from pneumonia. She was immediately put on a saline drip.

During admission we told the casualty staff that she was not to be resuscitated if she suffered a heart attack or equivalent event and this was readily accepted. We knew that this was her wish in such a case.

Being in some shock we did not immediately think about the document from the Voluntary Euthanasia Society (the previous name of Dying with Dignity) that she had completed with my brother and I five years earlier. After a day or so we remembered it, located it and rang the neurologist to have a meeting to discuss how to manage my mother.

Before this meeting I had said to my mother that the doctor was intending to give her a feeding tube as well as the hydration drip. She had recovered slightly to the point that she could grunt `No`. I then asked her if she would refuse it if it were offered to her. She grunted `Yes`. These were her last coherent words.

By this time we understood that there were three possible courses of action, all of them unattractive.

Fully support her with hydration and nutrition which would keep her alive indefinitely, almost totally disabled, a prospect which we knew appalled her.

Support her with hydration only which would have meant that she would starve to death over the next 6 to 8 weeks

Withdraw all support which would mean that she would die in about a week from dehydration. This was the option she had specified in her docu-

My Mother's Death

ment

My brother and I presented the document to the neurologist who was reluctant at first, but after some discussion, agreed to carry out the wishes expressed in it. It was clear to him what she wanted done in this situation. This was that she should not be artificially supported in such a case with either hydration or nutrition and that she

“By this time we understood that there were three possible courses of action, all of them unattractive.”

should be allowed to die naturally. The neurologist agreed that any discomfort would be alleviated with morphine as seemed necessary. There was some concern that the nursing staff would not agree to the withdrawal of hydration, but this did not eventuate.

The document specified that a second doctor should examine her and had to agree with the diagnosis and prognosis. This was done and it was agreed that her prospects of any significant recovery were remote and if they occurred she would have been close to 100 years old. In addition, several critical long term medications had been stopped and the consequences of this would have caused a host of other problems, several of them likely to be fatal in the longer term.

My mother took nine days to pass away, a terrible time for all of us. The doctor asked me after two or three days if I was having second thoughts. I replied that I was having them all the time and each time I put myself through the same questions and logic and came to the same conclusion, however unpalatable it was.

The importance of the document cannot be overstated. I became more aware of how insulated our society is from the harsh realities of death, so that when it inevitably occurs, we are unprepared for it and equally unprepared to make crucial decisions at times of great stress when our ability to make them may not be at its best. The document

showed that these matters had been carefully considered in advance and the decisions made at an unstressed time. It therefore was of great assistance to us in determining exactly what to do and how to negotiate on her behalf. It was certified by her GP at the time to the effect that she was of sound mind and capable of making a rational declaration

While my brother and I both held power of attorney, this was never asked for and in any case it gave no indication of my mother's wishes, only the right in principle to make decisions on her behalf. The Dying with Dignity form has no legal force, but it has huge moral force, which was of critical importance in deciding the issue because it specified very exactly what she wished for herself. Without it, our declarations of what we knew to be our mother's wishes could not be verified and there could always be the suspicion that we had other motives for wanting her to be allowed to die quickly. My brother and I were named as agents and therefore we saw ourselves as being charged with the responsibility of carrying out her wishes. She had discussed the matter with us many times and the document was the means to achieve this without dispute.

“The importance of the Advance Directive [living will] document cannot be overstated.”

One matter which was not adequately addressed in her treatment was the alleviation of the psychological aspect of her probably knowing that she was dying and being unable to communicate with us. We argued for more use of morphine, but its use was restricted to alleviation of physical discomfort only. Any more use of it would have been seen as approaching euthanasia as opposed to palliative care. It was curious to us that, while the doctor prescribed the maximum dosage and frequency of morphine administration, it was the nurses who decided when and how much to give.

Michael Meszaros

Seeking Someone Special...

No, we're not starting a new dating service for members who claim they are DTE, have a GSOH, like dinners out and walks on the beach in an LTR!

Rather, our wonderful staff Rowena and Jane actually need some assistance at peak busy periods, so we're looking for a new person to help staff the office on a part-time basis.

You will need to be a people person with a friendly phone manner, be organised and have some basic computer skills such as Microsoft Word and Outlook. We will give you some training on Quickbooks and other software where necessary.

Obviously, you need to be in com-

plete support of DWDV and its aims.

Someone flexible in the hours and times (office hours) and a willingness to accept that there may be brief periods

“Must be friendly, organised, and not scared of computers.”

without work would be ideal, as peak periods vary throughout the year.

If you think that special someone might just be you, then send a letter of interest outlining your experience and qualities to Rowena at the office.

We look forward to your application.

New Videos in Library

DWDV has received copies of two interesting programmes which are now available for loan to members from our library.

The first is a copy of the SBS Insight programme of 15th March 2007 titled *Last Rights*. The debate features DWDV members Mary Walsh & Rodney Syme, together with Marshal Perron and Philip Nitschke, and Federal Ageing Minister Christopher Pyne and others. DVD-PAL, 53 min.

The second video is a record of a public forum organized by U3A Port Phillip and others, titled *Aging: Being in Control*. This was largely due to the efforts of U3A's Heather Wheat, and features DWDV members Helga Kuhse and Rodney Syme, as well as others, in a spirited debate of refusal of treatment, advance directives and end of life issues. The debate was chaired by media personality, Peter Couchman. DVD-PAL, 2.5 hours.

Considered a Bequest?

Did you know that DWDV receives no Government funding at all? We operate exclusively from membership fees, donations and bequests. These are used to cover our substantial operating costs, though of course we work on the smell of an oily rag to provide our services to the Victorian community.

You can help those who follow you achieve a dignified death by remembering DWDV in your will, using the following wording:

I GIVE to DYING WITH DIGNITY VICTORIA INC. of 3/9b Salisbury Avenue, Blackburn, Victoria 3130, the sum of _____ [in words] (\$_____) for the general purposes of that Society and I DIRECT that the receipt of the Secretary, Treasurer or other proper officer of the Society for the time being shall be a sufficient discharge unto my Executor.

Workshops

Receive a set of documents to help specify your own end-of-life wishes. Experience two and a half hours of expert tuition in a friendly atmosphere; how the current law applies to you, as well as how to complete, witness and store the DWDV documents to maximise your protection. "Very helpful, lucid and clear explanations of a difficult theme."—Attendee

Malvern workshops
3rd Sep 10–12:30, 22nd Oct 10–12:30

Member Pensioner: \$20
Member Non-Pensioner: \$40
Non-member Pensioner: \$40
Non-member Non-Pensioner: \$80

Call the office on 9877 7677 to reserve your place. They fill up fast!

Movie Socials

Those who joined us for our film/lunch and screening of *La Vie En Rose* will probably agree Marion Cotillard will win Best Female Actor at this year's Oscars in Hollywood for her absolutely stunning performance.



Marion Cotillard gave a stunning performance as Edith Piaf.

La Vie En Rose tells the story of the legendary French songstress, Edith Piaf. From childhood poverty to glory, from triumph to despair—it makes our lives seem very dull and ordinary by comparison. Edith may no longer be with us, but that incomparable voice lives on.

We have a lot of fun with our friendly members and hope you might join us for future outings. Not all of them are advertised in this newsletter, so contact Rowena on 9877 7677 to get yourself on the invitation list.

Jill Paterson

Hairspray!

Starring John Travolta, Michelle Pfeiffer and Christopher Walkin, this movie is about Tracy Turnblad, a girl with big hair and an even bigger heart and one passion—dancing—but her pint-sized figure has always set her apart from the cool crowd. And she has an overprotective, plus-sized mother, Edna (played by Travolta), creating mayhem!

Come join us for this fun movie and lunch at the Palace Cinema, 223 Whitehorse Road, Balwyn, 14th Sept, 10:30am for 11am start (Jill will hand out tickets out on the day.)

Tickets are just \$21 each for the movie and lunch. Call Rowena now as places are strictly limited!

