

President's Report

It is a great honour to have become the DWDV President. I am aware of the enormous shoes of past presidents that I will attempt to fill. These include those of Hugh Sarjeant, Lesley Vick and particularly the gigantic footwear of the late Rodney Syme.

I would like to thank Hugh for fulfilling the role of President for five years. His commitment to the Board was exemplary, and the kindness and generosity of his nature contributed to the makings of a wonderful Board. Thankfully Hugh has elected to stay on as a Board member. We would also like to farewell and thank Meredith Doig for her contribution to DWDV over eight years, during five of which she assumed the role of Secretary. Meredith's work was invaluable and appreciated by not only DWDV but by all DWD organizations around Australia. It would be remiss of me not to mention her incredible, recurrent generosity in making her home with its beautiful surroundings available for numerous Board Meetings and the annual Christmas Party! We wish Meredith well in what is obviously a very exciting and happy time for her.

I am so lucky to be working with such an incredibly talented team who happen to have the additional virtues of being the most wonderfully kind, passionate and fun individuals. Lyn Stavretis is the new Vice-President and Jane Nosworthy is our new Secretary. We also welcome Michelle Hindson to the Board.

DWDV has finished the year with a great sense of accomplishment. Despite not receiving the judgement we had so hoped to hear handed down from the Federal Court in relation to the Federal ban on VAD telehealth consultations, we applaud the initiative and courage shown by Dr Nick Carr in pursuing this case and have been greatly heartened by the ensuing supportive media reports.

The first session of a pilot support program was completed this year, for those who had accompanied a loved one through the VAD process.

This program was the result of a collaborative effort between Griefline and DWDV. I would like to thank Jane Nosworthy, Nicole Grundy and the wonderful Griefline team for all the work

they did to get this valuable program up and running, and greatly look forward to hearing more about programs to be run next year.

We are incredibly excited about our Young Ambassador program, which welcomes young ambassadors from all over Australia. There has been a great deal of enthusiasm and hard work involved in establishing this program and we eagerly await to hear more in the New Year. A special thank you to Danielle Clarke, Jono Simko, Anna Philip and Olivia Nicholls for their involvement in this ground-breaking initiative.

Our AGM was held on Saturday 11th of November. It was well attended and we were delighted to be able to distribute copies of Dr Rodney Syme's recently published book 'A Completed Life'. Esteemed journalist Michael Bachelard was our guest speaker. Rodney greatly admired Michael and they had worked together at the time of the Aged Care Royal Commission. This year, as a journalist, Michael courageously broached the subject of Voluntary Assisted Dying and Dementia. His articles in The Age initiated an avalanche of feedback and discussion around the country. We can't thank Michael enough for his brilliant talk and for taking the time to speak at our meeting during his extremely hectic schedule.



Jane Morris

Continued on P2 ...

Continued from P1 ...

Former Vice President of DWDV, John Hont, was announced at the AGM as the recipient of the annual Rodney Syme medal. John is a very worthy recipient, and we are so grateful that he has continued to provide us with help and his sage advice since retiring from the Board.

I would like to thank the other DWD organisations around Australia, Go Gentle Australia, the Victorian VAD Statewide Care Navigators, the Victorian VAD Review Board and other advocacy groups around the world for their friendship and willingness to engage collaboratively with us.

Thank you also to Sue, our Communications Officer, for her work on our website and newsletters and to Natalie, our General Manager, for everything she does to keep things running smoothly.

We also must thank all our wonderful volunteers who act as witnesses for individuals who need independent witnesses to sign their final request for VAD. Incredibly, our small team has assisted over 430 patients to date.

I hope all our members, supporters, witness volunteers, members of the 'Rapid Writers Group', colleagues and importantly friends and families of those no longer with us, have a restful end-of-year break. Hopefully we will all get a chance to recharge our batteries and return with the renewed vigour and determination needed to ensure that terminally ill Victorians do not have to endure suffering in death.

Best wishes
Jane

New Board Member: Michelle Hindson

We are delighted to welcome Michelle Hindson to the DWDV Board!

During my career as a strategic corporate affairs professional with major organisations, I have dealt with a wide range of issues and challenges and I look forward to bringing my skills and insights to complement the diverse talents of the DWDV board. I am honoured to be a member of the board, and to work towards every individual having control of their end-of-life choices.

My commitment to the right to die with dignity began when my vivacious and spirited mother faced a slow, painful and undignified death from metastatic bowel cancer and multiple sclerosis.

My loving, compassionate and entertaining father suffered from dementia and was incarcerated for five bewildering and stultifying years before he died an agonising and protracted death. Fifteen years ago my mother had no choice but to attempt, unsuccessfully, to take her own life.



Michelle Hindson

My previous volunteering with Exit, and now as a Witness with DWDV, has further strengthened my conviction and I also firmly believe that people suffering from dementia should be able to access VAD.

Victoria: from leader to laggard in VAD

An article written by John Hont (former VP of DWDV) outlines problematic issues within the current VAD legislation for Victoria.

Other states have made improvements over our Act, in general providing greater access to VAD than is available in Victoria. ACT and NT are expected to follow soon, with legislation that is likely to be radically broader in scope than Victoria's. After leading the way, we now risk falling behind.

Read more here on our website:

<https://www.dwdv.org.au/other-resources/victoria-from-leader-to-laggard-in-voluntary-assisted-dying/>



The 5-year review of the Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017

Since June 2019, Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 (the Act) enables eligible Victorians who are suffering and dying to choose the manner and timing of their death.

The Centre for Evaluation and Research Evidence (CERE), at the Victorian Government Department of Health, is now reviewing the operation of the first four years of the Act. The review is seeking feedback from Victorians who have thought about or taken steps to access voluntary assisted dying in Victoria. Views from their families and carers are also welcome. This is a chance to share your experience to improve the processes and programs for voluntary assisted dying in Victoria. This will help make this end-of-life choice safe, accessible, timely, and compassionate for eligible people.

The review will not consider changes to the Act itself (e.g. changes to eligibility criteria).

Submissions can be provided through Engage Victoria:

<https://engage.vic.gov.au/review-of-the-operation-of-the-voluntary-assisted-dying-act>.

The survey on this website will take about 10-15 minutes to complete. It also includes an opportunity to take part in an interview. We strongly encourage individuals, families, carers, organisations, and healthcare workers who have been involved with VAD since 2019 to provide a submission.

Submissions close on Friday February 23, 2024.

If you have any questions about the review, please email the CERE team at: CERE.VAD@health.vic.gov.au or call 1300 599 169. You may wish to make use of the National Relay Service.



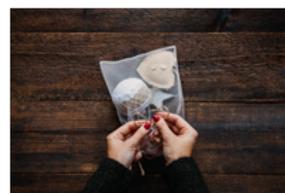
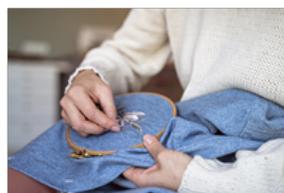
Grief through art

Following the death of someone special in their lives, many people find it cathartic to write down their thoughts. Not everyone can convey their grief through the written word, and it may be a much easier and more satisfying way to express their feelings through artwork. Everyone is different, so this might be drawing, painting, ceramics, photography, textiles, calligraphy, scrapbooking ... any form of creative expression.

DWDV feels privileged to have been able to share on our website many written personal stories, but we would love also to create a gallery of artistic stories.

If you would like us to include your artwork please send a photo of your final piece to comms@dwdv.org.au.

Please also let us know what you would like us to use as a brief caption for your photo, and if we can add your full name or just a first name to acknowledge you.



Learn Me Right podcasts

This is a valuable and most informative resource!

'Learn Me Right' (supported by the Australian Centre for Health Law Research at QUT) has released a 10-episode podcast series on Voluntary Assisted Dying in Australia. In this series, Sinead and Ruthie interview 10 expert researchers in the End-of-Life Law research team from the Australian Centre for Health Law Research at QUT.



The series comprehensively maps the Australian VAD system, including:

- an overview of VAD law reform;
- how VAD systems have operated in practice for patients and families in Victoria and WA; and
- nationwide issues like the ban discussing "suicide" via telehealth, lack of remuneration for doctors, and institutional objections to providing VAD.

As Australia does not have a particularly "death-literate" culture, and also given the infancy of VAD access in Australia as well as the nuances between State laws around eligibility, the series encourages listeners to feel confident, educated, and prepared to:

- have conversations about VAD and know this is a lawful option in their State;
- understand some of the key challenges and frontiers for change to VAD systems in the future; and
- support someone who may wish to access VAD (or understand that it may be an available option for them).

The podcast is available here: <https://research.qut.edu.au/voluntary-assisted-dying-regulation/impact/>

Demystifying death



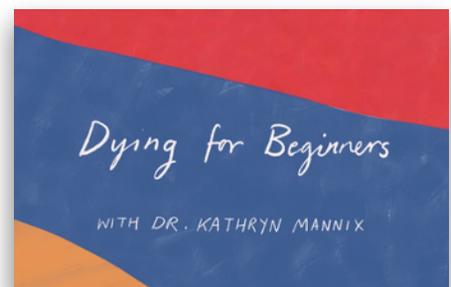
Dr Kathryn Mannix

Even people who are comfortable discussing death – including the inevitable prospect of their own – might understand little about how it actually tends to unfold unless they've experienced it firsthand alongside a loved one. In this brief 3-minute animation, author Kathryn Mannix, who worked as a palliative care physician for 20 years, offers viewers a sensitive, honest and practical guide to how death tends to progress under normal, or perhaps ideal, circumstances.

<https://vimeo.com/877812590>

This follows on from her wonderful video from a few years ago, 'Dying is not as bad as you think', in which she also talks about the natural progression of death, and argues it's time to break the taboo that exists around death - dying is something we should be reclaiming and we should be talking about.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CruBRZh8quc>



Email: dwdv@dwdv.org.au

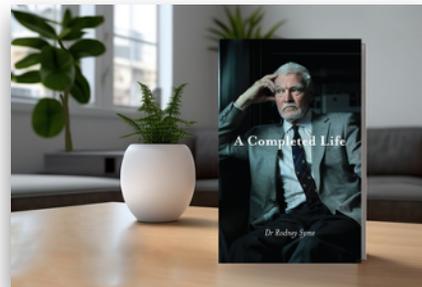
Phone: 0491 718 632

Address: PO Box 743, Kew, VIC, 3101,

A Completed Life by Dr Rodney Syme

Thank you for allowing this book to be produced and distributed. As our population continues to increase, as the number of very old persons continues to rise, the matters raised in this book will become even more important than they are already. We will have fewer people paying tax, we will have a smaller budget "cake" and we will have a rising number of needy aged people demanding care."

Peter Baume AC, Retired Doctor and former NSW Senator and former Minister for Health and Aged Care.



Dying With Dignity Victoria is extremely proud to announce the recent publication of 'A Completed Life', a book written by the late Dr Rodney Syme. Shortly after his death, DWDV was made aware of a manuscript that Rodney had almost completed. His book discusses issues that Rodney was so very passionate about and wished to address as his next project in life. These issues are those of dementia, the lack of end-of-life choices for the elderly, the abysmal state of Aged Care and the concept of wanting to end one's life after having lived a fulfilling and satisfying life that no longer provides satisfaction or enjoyment. The ineligibility of these groups of individuals to access a Voluntary Assisted Death is the recurrent underlying message that Rodney so passionately wished to convey.

Supportive essays are included in the book by contributors Michael Bachelard, Dr Nick Carr, Andrew Denton, Guy Pearce, Associate Professor Cathy Henkel, and Dr Helga Kuhse, with a moving preface by Rodney's three children.

You can purchase a copy of 'A Completed Life' through the Dying With Dignity Victoria website here: <https://www.dwdv.org.au/store/>

Review of A Completed Life

"A Completed Life" was published posthumously some two years after author Dr Rodney Syme died. It is a potent and compelling read that advocates with logic and profound medical insights for humane and pragmatic end-of-life options. Published by Dying With Dignity Victoria, the book is a poignant and enduring final testament to its author.

Rodney's decades-long commitment to the cause was widely publicised and documented in his previous books. He died in 2021, only months after his wife Meg died from Alzheimer's disease. His many years of experience in dealing with the dementia issue that culminated in him being Meg's carer, along with his two daughters and son, are detailed in the chapter, Dementia: The whole catastrophe.

Chapters have been contributed by other writers including medical professionals and advocates who have lost loved ones in troubled circumstances. These add to the overall story of voluntary assisted dying for the aged and terminally ill. My story forms one chapter – my wife Marie was diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease aged 54 and died aged 61. I sought and received Rodney's assistance when, in her final days, Marie was clearly distressed, in pain and in a vegetative state. His guidance and professional advice resulted in a peaceful, pain-free death. An article I wrote that was published in a UK magazine shortly after her death in 2009 is re-published in the chapter with my deepest gratitude.

"A Completed Life" makes for compelling reading. Rodney writes beautifully and advocates with both compassion and logic.

Tom Valenta, DWDV member and author of *Remember me, Mrs V? Caring for my wife: her Alzheimer's and others' stories.*



Telehealth continues to be illegal for terminally ill people seeking VAD

Telehealth continues to be illegal for terminally ill people seeking Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD).

Rural and regional Australians will continue to be disadvantaged by the Federal Court decision, making it illegal for doctors to use telehealth to support people applying for VAD.

Dr Nick Carr, GP and Board Member of DWDV, brought an application to clarify the meaning of suicide in relation to VAD. On November 30, The Federal Court ruled not to change the current interpretation, meaning telehealth will continue to be unavailable to support the most vulnerable people seeking VAD.

As Dr Carr commented, "This an enormous disappointment for terminally ill people in rural and regional Australia who are too ill to travel to medical appointments to seek VAD."

This battle is not over!

Read more and download our press release from the News section on our website.



Should people living with dementia be eligible for voluntary assisted dying?

It has been four years since voluntary assisted dying was made legal in Victoria. Some now argue several of Victoria's 68 safeguards are now obsolete. Legislation is currently up for review and some doctors, families and patients are calling for the scheme to be expanded to include people with dementia.

An edition of ABC Radio's The Conversation Hour explores what safeguards would need to be put in place to allow for people living with dementia to have access to voluntary assisted dying. Also joining the conversation are Pam Eade, who was diagnosed with dementia two years ago and who shares why she would like to have access, and DWDV Board member, Dr Nick Carr. (Dr Carr's segment starts about 15 minutes in).

<https://www.abc.net.au/listen/programs/theconversationhour/the-conversation-hour/103144940>



Australian VAD laws compared

A recent article from The Conversation begins with the announcement of the NSW VAD laws coming into effect on 28 November, and goes on to provide a brief summary of the current situation across Australia, comparing the law in NSW with laws in other states.

It also makes for interesting reading in relation to some of the differences between the states.

Read more in the News section on our website.



We lost this round – but not the battle

DWDV members will no doubt be aware that on November 30, in the Federal Court, Justice Wendy Abraham found that the Commonwealth Criminal Codes Act does indeed apply to VAD consultations by telehealth. (For a more detailed discussion of this issue, please see the previous Newsletter).

In a technical judgement, Justice Abraham concluded that taking a VAD medication does come under the definition of suicide. In a way, I was not surprised. The hearing itself was almost a ‘battle of the dictionaries’, with a focus on words, how they are used, grinding explications about the differences between connotation and denotation and suchlike. At times it felt like a question of he (yes, the lawyers were all men) who uses the most obfuscation and polysyllables wins.

Nowhere in court was the human experience heard. I wanted to scream; I have seen VAD deaths. They are sad, yes, but peaceful, welcomed, supported by family and friends. Those left behind fare as well or better than after most deaths. I have also seen suicide, I have been touched by this personally, and it is hideous, distressing, traumatic for all involved and leaves the bereaved bewildered and distraught. One is a legitimate medical option, the other a lonely act of desperation.

How can you say these are the same thing? I wanted to scream.

Turns out screaming in the Federal Court is not the preferred way of proceeding. So subdued sesquipedalianism ensued.

And we lost.

But while the legal question may be settled, the issue is now well and truly out there. It demands resolution, with possible avenues including the AGs themselves, or a private member’s Bill being proposed by independent Kate Chaney from WA. I and DWDV will continue to be actively involved, and won’t rest until sense prevails.

I am extremely grateful to my legal team for their unwavering support, particularly Piper Alderman and senior partner Tim Lange, who have acted pro bono and with great diligence throughout. They put in a huge amount of work.

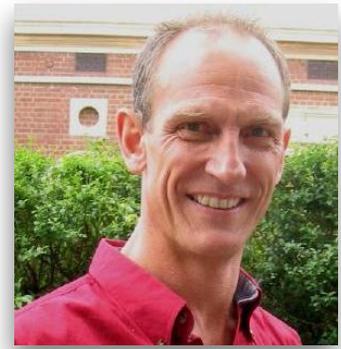
The contributions of Daniel McCredden and Ben Ihle KC as counsel in this matter are also deeply appreciated. I would like to acknowledge with gratitude their agreement to cap their fees in this matter, which resulted in significant pro bono work on their part.

I had enormous support from all at DWDV, particularly from Hugh Sarjeant, Jane Morris and Jane Nosworthy. Michelle Hindson provided invaluable assistance with preparing media statements. Thanks to you all, and to the many others who supported the work that went into this matter.

The DWDV Board voted to pay the not insignificant legal fees that were incurred, and for this I am deeply grateful. I hope that members agree this was appropriate use of some of our funds.

Next year we will continue to pursue this matter. I promise to try not to scream.

Nick Carr, December 2023.



Dr Nick Carr

Editor’s Note: For the curious who do not have a dictionary immediately to hand ... “sesquipedalianism” means the extravagant use of exceedingly long words. It’s really a language joke, as the word itself is very long. The phrase “sesquipedalia verba” was coined by the Roman humourist Horace in the 1st century BC. Horace was satirizing another writer’s habit of using long words. The Latin term sesqui means “one and a half” and ped means foot; hence, words that are a foot and a half long.

NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA ...

National

Go Gentle Australia (GGA) and Voluntary Assisted Dying Australia and New Zealand (VADANZ) jointly sponsored the inaugural Voluntary Assisted Dying National Conference, in Sydney, on September 27-28. It was a huge success and was attended by VAD health professionals, policymakers, peak bodies, and health advocacy organizations. A report released by GGA following the conference listed the three main issues relating to VAD legislation that need to be most urgently addressed:



- The Federal ban on VAD discussion that prevents a doctor discussing with a patient the topic of VAD using telehealth, or other electronic carriage services.
- The removal of the “gag clause”. This clause applies to Victorian and South Australian legislation and prevents doctors from raising the topic of VAD as an end-of-life option with patients.
- The inadequate, and in some cases non-existent remuneration for VAD practitioners.

Further news on the telehealth VAD ban is that DWDV Board member and GP Dr Nick Carr, had been seeking a judicial interpretation of the definition of 'suicide' referred to in the 2005 amendment of the Commonwealth Criminal Code 1995.

His case was heard in the Federal Court on 16 October 2023, and we were all extremely disappointed and thoroughly disheartened by the decision handed down on the 30th of November, in which VAD was defined as 'suicide'. Meanwhile Western Australian Senator Kate Chaney has said she will table a bill in the new year to overturn the telehealth ban. Dying With Dignity Victoria congratulates Nick for leading this initiative and fighting for the rights of discriminated individuals in Australian states.

Victoria

DWDV was very excited to announce in September the commencement of a pilot program for a VAD support group, established collaboratively with Griepline, to support family and friends who had accompanied loved ones on their VAD journey. Unfortunately, we still hear stories about terminally ill individuals deemed eligible for VAD but refused help in some faith-based hospitals. Headlines were made around Australia with the ground-breaking news that a Ballarat nurse had become the first Australian to donate organs following a voluntary assisted death. Marlene Bevern's story was a tragic one, as the 66-year-old Ballarat nurse suffered from MND, but her selfless decision to donate organs following VAD was an uplifting story and heartening for many. Shortly before her death Marlene was informed that, because of her incredible generosity, four lives would be saved. Her smile upon being told this news evidently said it all. A few weeks later, also in Ballarat, a similar procedure was undertaken. It was interesting to note that following the resignation of the Victorian Premier, Daniel Andrews, most of the follow-up media articles referred to the passage of Victorian VAD legislation in 2017 as being one of his greatest achievements. Finally, submissions are now open for the five-year review of the operation of Victoria's Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017. The Department of Health's Centre for Evaluation and Research Evidence (CERE) is conducting an independent review of the operation of the first four years of the Act. Submissions close on Friday February 23, 2024.



South Australia

The Premier's Award for Excellence in Health 2023 was made to the SA Health VAD team. It is an award of high distinction befitting the diligence and commitment of the VAD team. Congratulations to all including the indefatigable duo, President Frances Coombe and Vice President Anne Bunning of Voluntary Assisted Dying South Australia (VADSA), who were specifically mentioned.



NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA (cont) ...

New South Wales

It has taken a long time for this day to arrive, but finally suffering terminally ill residents of NSW have the option of requesting access to VAD. The law came into effect on November 28, and it is expected that many people will seek access to an assisted death in the first 6 months of operation. It was reported in October that up to 150 health practitioners had signed up to become VAD providers. The NSW Health department should be applauded for the voluminous amount of incredibly comprehensive and informative material they have made available to members of the public. More than 700 healthcare workers and community members attended the NSW VAD implementation conference in September. On the downside several aged care facility organisations have stated their refusal to allow VAD in their facilities. Congratulations to DWDNSW and GGA for all their work in achieving this goal, particularly Penny Hackett, President DWDNSW, and CEO Shayne Higson on what must seem like a lifetime of commitment dedicated to reaching this stage.



Queensland

In September results of the first 6 months of VAD implementation were released. From January 1, 2023, until June 2023, 600 people applied for VAD and 245 were able to access it. This is the highest number of VAD deaths recorded in an Australian state in the first 6 months of operation. It has been suggested these numbers may be higher than other states because of broadened eligibility criteria in QLD - specifically the extension of time until death prognosis. In QLD this is 12 months for all conditions, unlike Victoria and other states where death must be expected to occur within 6 months except in the case of neurodegenerative illness where a 12-month prognosis is allowed. The report highlighted a warning provided by doctors of the unfair hurdles faced by the terminally ill trying to access VAD in regional areas. One reason emphasised is the shortage of VAD-trained practitioners in Northern Queensland. This problem again highlights the urgent need to repeal the Federal ban on telehealth consultations.



Tasmania

On November 1 the Tasmanian Department of Health released its first full VAD report. This covered the period from the end of October 2022, when VAD commenced in TAS, until June 30 this year. In this period there were 72 first requests, 44 final requests and 25 VAD deaths, which constituted 0.5% of all deaths in the state. The Commission noted that the number of health practitioners accessing VAD training exceeded expectations. It also commented that the Commonwealth carriage laws were causing significant hardship.



The Australian Capital Territory

Fantastic news from the ACT. MLA Tara Cheyne introduced a VAD Bill into the ACT Parliament. It has been welcomed by VAD advocates around Australia because of its progressive nature. Most notably this bill differs from other States' legislation in that it does not require a specification of time until death and nurse practitioners are able to assess patients for eligibility. Minister Cheyne had originally wanted to include a provision that would allow minors to access VAD, but this was dropped prior to the tabling of the bill due to the complex nature of the issue.



NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA (cont) ...

The Northern Territory

It appears that finally there is movement at the NT VAD station. A Northern Territory VAD Advisory panel has been established, co-chaired by Vicki O'Halloran AO CVO and Duncan McConnel SC. The NT government is holding VAD Community Consultation Meetings around the Territory. It has emerged from these meetings that a key issue of great concern to Northern Territorians is the ineligibility of those diagnosed with dementia to access an assisted death, as is the case in the Australian States. Duncan McConnel said this would be a significant step but acknowledged the associated ethical and legal issues.



Western Australia

A mandatory review of WA's VAD law after the second anniversary of operation is now underway. An independent panel has been appointed specifically to look at the operation and effectiveness of the Act to examine whether it is meeting the needs of the community as an end-of-life choice, and to identify what has worked well in WA. The West Australian review of VAD has ruled out allowing access for those suffering from dementia to VAD, despite both the former and current Premiers having previously indicated their support for this. The WA VAD Review Board has issued its annual report for 2022-23 and reported that there were 255 voluntary assisted dying deaths recorded, representing an increase of 33.5% from when the laws were introduced in 2019. The report made special mention of the distressing fact that some people are being denied access to VAD by some hospitals. Concern was also expressed for the inadequate remuneration for VAD under Medicare because VAD is not listed on the Medicare Benefits Schedule.



... AND AROUND THE WORLD

Belgium

The Bishop of Antwerp stated in an interview that he did not believe the practice of assisted dying, in contrast to the Church's teaching, to be "evil as such." A sizable number of people, notably from France, have been traveling to Belgium to access assisted dying. The president of the Belgian Right to Die Society says that she worries that Belgium has a false image abroad of being extremely permissive, and she points out that a person still must meet strict eligibility criteria.



Denmark

The Ethics Council has advised against introducing VAD in Denmark, despite the fact that the Prime Minister has indicated she might be in favour.

Ecuador

The Constitutional Court in Ecuador is considering an application for the right to die from a woman with Motor Neurone Disease.

AROUND THE WORLD (cont)



Canada

The fourth annual report was released, *Medical Assistance in Dying in Canada 2022*.

In 2022, there were 13,241 MAID provisions reported in Canada, accounting for 4.1% of all deaths in Canada. The number of cases of MAID in 2022 represented a growth rate of 31.2% over 2021. There continues to be staunch opposition to the expansion of MAID eligibility for those whose sole underlying condition is a mental illness, due to commence in March next year. Many have expressed concerns that mental health services are falling short and leaving the mentally ill with few options. As a result, a bill was introduced into the Parliament which would have prevented this expansion of the MAID bill. The bill was defeated in a very close vote. There has been an avalanche of sensationalist headlines continuing to emanate out of Canada by those who oppose MAID. In many Canadian provinces such as Ontario, many nurse practitioners who are MAID providers are not paid for their work. Whilst the number of individuals seeking an assisted death is rising, the number of nurse and doctor practitioners is failing to keep up.

Quebec (Canada)

Canada's recent MAID annual report shows that in Quebec there has been a 46% increase in those who accessed MAID in 2022 compared to the previous year. Approximately 6.6% of all deaths in Quebec were a result of MAID making the number of assisted deaths in Quebec higher than any jurisdiction in the world.

France

A case brought forward to the European Court of Human Rights by Dignitas and 31 French individuals against the state of France continues. They argue that the failure to permit VAD in France amounts to an offence under European human rights law. It was reported that an assisted dying bill would be presented to the French Parliament for debate in December. However President Emmanuel Macron has thrown these plans into doubt.

Hungary

A Hungarian man suffering from a neurodegenerative disease applied to the Hungarian government for the right to die. He has now taken his case to the European Court of Human Rights, where his suit is being vigorously opposed by a faith-based advocacy organisation.

Ireland

The Joint Oireachtas Committee on Assisted Dying resumed hearings at the end of September. A recent poll showed that 75% of people in Ireland support VAD for those with a terminal condition. The Irish College of Psychiatrists and The Royal College of Physicians of Ireland have both published position papers stating their opposition to VAD. The Irish College of General Practitioners gave evidence before the Oireachtas Committee stating that GPs are divided on the question, with many for and many against and another group who are either passively accepting or conflicted. Meanwhile among proponents of an assisted dying bill invited to front the committee were Victorian Palliative Care Physician Dr Greg Mewett, and Tasmanian Independent Mike Gaffney MLC, both of whom spoke extremely well. A member of Doctors Supporting Medical Assistance in Dying told the Oireachtas Committee that Ireland should adopt a "safe and conservative" regime, such as that in New Zealand and Australia.

AROUND THE WORLD (cont)



Italy

A 58-year-old Italian actress with terminal cancer sought an assisted death in Switzerland, after being denied permission for an assisted death in Rome because she was not reliant on life support. Another Italian woman who has suffered from MS since 2010 has been considered eligible for an assisted death. She had waited 11 months to get a response from her local medical ethics committee. She will be the fifth Italian to access an assisted death resulting from a high court ruling.

Korea

A man paralysed from the chest down, after an injection for a skin condition that went horribly wrong, is too sick to seek help in Switzerland. So he is going to petition the Constitutional Court to rule that the failure to pass a VAD law is an infringement of his human rights.

Poland

There has been further discussion about legalization of assisted dying in Poland. The Civil Coalition has stated its support for assisted dying legislation and this has led to intense debate from politicians and citizens.

The Netherlands

In 2022, there were 8,720 reported cases of euthanasia in the Netherlands. This is an increase of around 1,000 of such cases compared with the previous year, and the highest in the recorded period. A survey of family physicians and geriatricians found that many doctors experienced emotional strain and uncertainty when confronted with a request for an assisted death by a patient with dementia, and required more support. A bill that looks at those 'who are tired of life' is back on the political agenda.

Taiwan

Presidential candidate and former doctor, Ko Wen-je, says he would like to gauge public opinion on assisted dying.

United Kingdom

The Royal College of General Practitioners is setting up a Working Group to discuss how VAD might work in the UK. Updated guidelines written by The Crown Prosecution Service state that a prosecution is less likely if the deceased person had reached a voluntary, clear, settled, and informed decision that they wished for their life to end, and if the suspect who assisted them was motivated only by compassion. A survey of 1,000 UK doctors has shown 48% opposed legalising Assisted Dying legislation and 45% said they supported a change. Almost half were worried about the impact such legislation could have on their profession.

Isle of Man (UK)

It is hoped the Isle of Man will become the first crown dependency in Britain to legalize assisted dying. A survey claimed to have shown that 8 out of 10 people support the introduction of an assisted dying bill. However, in October it was reported that a majority of Isle of Man doctors are opposed to VAD and 34% of them say they would leave the island if VAD were to be legalised. In November The Isle of Man passed a VAD bill at its second reading, and it is now expected that 5 committee members will consider the clauses and report back in February 2024.

AROUND THE WORLD (cont)



Jersey (UK)

In October it was announced that the proposed VAD Jersey bill has been delayed for four months.

Scotland

An assisted dying bill will be introduced into the Scottish Parliament, Holyrood, in the next few months. The sponsor of the bill, MSP Liam McArthur, is optimistic about its prospects and has stated that MSPs will be provided with a conscience vote. There have been two previous attempts to pass assisted dying legislation at Holyrood in 2010 and 2015. These were rejected by a majority of MSPs. Disability groups remain vehemently opposed to the introduction of VAD legislation, as is the Health Secretary.

The United States

The American Medical Association has decided to retain its oppositional stance to VAD. It was hoped that it would change its position to one of neutrality. There has been a flurry of activity with many U.S state legislatures looking at VAD legislation. Despite the failure of an assisted dying bill to advance through a public health committee earlier this year in Connecticut, advocates are joining forces to push for legislation to be passed in the next legislative session in 2024. In Minnesota, Democratic lawmakers will use their majority to bring a VAD bill into the legislature in 2024. The Minnesota House of Representatives reported that nearly 75% of residents were in favour of VAD. In October, New Hampshire debated a VAD bill. The Massachusetts legislature is debating a VAD bill that is said to contain rigorous safeguards, but is still vehemently opposed by members of the disability community and conservatives. Wisconsin lawmakers introduced the Death with Dignity Bill for terminally ill patients and Michigan's Senate has introduced the Death with Dignity Act.

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