



**Our Mission:** To bring about such changes in Western Australian Statute Law and to medical ethics as will allow a person to receive medically assisted euthanasia under circumstances specified by him or her, when legally competent to do so.

## Why our State Parliamentarians are fighting shy of *Voluntary Euthanasia*

Various reliable Polls indicate that eighty percent of the population in WA are in favour of legalisation of voluntary euthanasia and that support is over 70% nationwide and yet the West Australian Parliament refuses to heed the popular demand. We are entitled to ask why and should look for the answers. Since they are usually reluctant to give any specific reasons for their objections, let us examine the usual points raised by individual politicians.

It has been claimed that our life is given by God and only God can take it away. Very commendable, but why then should we interfere with God's wishes and desperately try to extend life by all sorts of medical technology and wizardry? We do try to defy death for as long as we can, so we can forget about God's wishes and may as well ignore this particular objection as a mere furphy. We cannot have it both ways.

It is also claimed that palliative care is now so advanced that practically all pain can be controlled and thus legalised active voluntary euthanasia is unnecessary. Everyone knows and accepts that pain cannot be controlled in all cases and there are many cases where palliative care is just not enough. Palliative Care is also not the panacea for distress, discomfort or loss of dignity.

It is not pain or fear of death that agitates the minds of the majority of elderly persons. It is the loss of dignity, independence and self-respect. To me, one of the cruellest blows will be to lose my mind. In advanced cases of dementia, which unfortunately affects a vast number of elderly persons, many slowly lose their independence and often end up totally dependent on others for living, personal care

and feeding, devoid of any dignity or even any meaning of life. Is it compassionate to force one to continue to live that life? I would suggest that it will be perfectly logical for a person to wish to end it, particularly if that person has made that feeling clear in advance. No palliative care can alleviate the problems of the mind.

It is also claimed that the vulnerable will be coerced to opt to die, but figures from various jurisdictions which have legalised voluntary euthanasia do not support that view at all.

*Cont >*



### **Notice of ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING**

**Wednesday, 26th October 2011  
at 2 pm  
Citiplace Community Centre**

**Please note change of date**

I know that some people have claimed wide scale misuse of the laws, but those claims are not substantiated and may be open to question. If a decision is voluntarily taken or voluntarily made in advance, how can the vulnerable be in any danger?

I do not claim that there will not be any misuse, but what law is there in our statute books that cannot be or is not misused at times? That does not stop us from legislating on practically everything from driving a car to keeping a dog. Why should the remote chance of misuse stop us from legislating on such an important subject as our lives?

Among the other points often raised against legalisation is that doctors should not be asked to 'kill' a patient. The word 'kill' is deliberately and emotively used where it should only mean 'assist to die', relieving the patient of suffering. Is it not what doctors are supposed to do: to relieve suffering in the best way they can?

If a drug were available to the patient without the doctor's help, then there would be no need for a doctor. Perhaps we can legislate that anyone above 80 could legally avail themselves of such a drug!

*Cont page 4*

## **A SAD FAREWELL TO ONE OF OUR OWN**

It is with great sorrow that we say a final farewell to

### **DR RALPH WHITE**

a founding member, Honorary Life Member and long time President of the West Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society, who passed away peacefully on 26<sup>th</sup> of May this year at a nursing home.

A chemist by profession, Ralph found himself in Germany at the end of World War II with the occupying forces. An academic by preference he ended up in Perth via Hamilton in New Zealand and Armidale.

He stood by and supported his wife Denise in the long and hard fight for the acceptance of lawful abortion and logically joined the fight for legalisation of voluntary euthanasia after the fight for abortion was won. Both husband and wife were strong supporters of Humanist Society and were humanists to the core.

Ralph was very much the ideologue in the Voluntary Euthanasia Society and was instrumental in writing the booklet 'The Case For Voluntary Euthanasia', which laid down the policy and reasoning behind the conception of voluntary euthanasia. A great admirer of John Locke, he wrestled with the idea of passive and active voluntary euthanasia, as well as human and individual rights against the social implication of those rights.

In the thirty years of Ralph's association with the Society, he edited the newsletter, WAVES NEWS, and was an indispensable member of the Management Committee. Over the years his contribution to the Society was immense.

Always good natured, humorous with a dry wit, he was very popular among his colleagues. Everyone was inspired by his unflinching commitment and dedication to the cause.

He was alert to the end and his mind was as sharp as ever.

Unfortunately, like many before him, he could not enjoy the experience of having reached his goal. But his vision will live on.

**VALE RALPH**



# President's Report

This has been a year of disruption and travel (not always planned) for me and as a result my presidential duties have suffered accordingly. Most of the workload has again fallen on the shoulders of Past President Ranjan Ray. My thanks also go to the rest of the Management Committee, particularly to Bill O'Brien who has been involved in the week to week activities of WAVES and also acts as our Director on the board of YLR (YourLastRight.com).

During the year the following have been addressed:

## WAVES website

With the aid of Exact Images we have reviewed and "jazzed" up our website and the site should be up and running by this AGM.

## AHD and EPGs

Talks have been given by Ranjan and myself to groups regarding the completion of the WA Government's Advance Health Directive and Enduring Power of Guardianship. During these talks the involvement of WAVES in these areas was discussed and attendees were given the opportunity to join us. Our own Advance Directive is also being reviewed and will no longer include provision for a Power of Attorney. It is recommended that members complete the new government document for this purpose. When completed our revised AD will be available on our website but will still be sent on request to those without a computer connection.

## VE Forum

In June a forum on VE was held at the Ethics Centre at Christchurch Grammar School and moderated by the Rev Cannon Frank Sheehan. Speakers at the forum were from the University of Notre Dame, and Ranjan Ray and I represented WAVES. Although attendance could have been better it was pleasing to see our attendees put the UND speakers "through their paces". Although a useful exercise, I do not think our opposition went away swayed but were perhaps better informed.

## VE Legislation

Although no bills have been presented in WA since the failed Chapple Bill last year, there have been attempts in the Eastern States with, as yet, little success although an attempt is being made to decriminalize assistance given by doctors in this area. Efforts continue in the political sphere, supported by VEGroups in those states and the efforts of YLR.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the recent death of faithful and long serving member, Dr Ralph White, and recognize his service to WAVES over the past thirty years. We will miss Ralph's wisdom and experience.

In closing, I would remind our members that the effectiveness of WAVES depends entirely on the commitment and contributions of its members. Those who are able are urged to assist and consider membership of the Management Committee or participation in sub-committee activities. This ensures ongoing rejuvenation of our organization and eases the load on your current committee.

Murray Hindle

Another point I want to mention is the often repeated claim that a law cannot be enacted with enough safeguards against misuse. We have talked about safeguards and how that is a false and baseless claim, but I also want to say that the total responsibility for a sensible law should not be thrown to us. If the principle of legalised voluntary euthanasia is accepted then a sensible debate could take place as to what safeguards we would like to put in place. In the absence of an agreement 'in principle' it is just a red herring used to divert attention and deny legitimacy to a worrying problem.

Various researches have confirmed that the quality of death experienced by terminally ill patients who requested and received lethal prescriptions was in some cases better, and in all cases no worse, than those who chose not to pursue physician-assisted dying.

I have tried to discuss the various objections raised against legalisation of voluntary euthanasia, but perhaps the most cogent and practical reason for the mental block on the part of politicians was emphasised by Prof Peter Baume, AC.

Prof Baume, ex-Senator and past Commissioner of the Australian Law Reform Commission among other responsible positions, said the following:

*"Now let me explain why they are reluctant. It has to do with what's called electoral arithmetic. Twenty-two percent of people are said to oppose voluntary euthanasia. Of these, perhaps eight percent are regular church goers, or they're*

*passionate opponents who might well change their vote against any one who supports the change in law that we seek.*

*Few parliamentarians have majorities that allow them to alienate up to eight percent of their electorate. There's what you call weak support, weak opposition, strong support, strong opposition. And much of the support for voluntary euthanasia is what's called weak support and about eight percent of the opposition is what you might call strong opposition.*

*So, driven by the imperative of re-election, parliamentarians vote down voluntary euthanasia Bills. No question of principle here, just self-preservation. Mind you, they won't admit that. They'll dress up their concerns in a cloth of deceit and obfuscation and contrived principle."* <sup>1</sup>

It is the reason why nearly every politician is far more honest, supportive and openly vocal **after** retiring from active politics. It is obvious that we shall have to convince the politicians that there is just as much risk of losing a similar number of voters if they persist in opposing voluntary euthanasia and there is our opportunity to actively lobby every politician.

It is not a question of principle, it is a question of convincing the politicians that they have nothing to fear if they vote for what they believe in.

Ranjan Ray

1. "We need legislation" – Prof Peter Baume AC – VESNSW newsletter July 2009

## NAME CHANGE for Advance Directive

After some deliberation the Committee has decided to rename our **Advance Directive "Living Will"** again, as this may prevent confusion with the Government's AHD form. Members can still use the Government's form to comply with all legal requirements, but as WAVES' form is more exact in detail, includes a note on VE and will be honoured under Common Law, you may like to consider using both forms. The new form is available to our members on request.

## BEQUESTS AND DONATIONS

WAVES is very grateful for donations and bequests - these gifts help finance costs and enables us to do what is needed to further our voluntary euthanasia aims.

Did you know that you can make a bequest in your will without making a new will by signing a short codicil? Our website shows how this is done, or we can assist you.

Thank you for your loyal support.

# Election of Office Bearers

## Notice of a ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Wednesday, 26th October 2011 at 2 pm

### Citiplace Community Centre

on the walkway between the Art Gallery and Myer Store opposite the escalators at Perth Railway Station.

Our guest speaker will be :

*Mr Roger Cook MLA , Deputy Leader of the Opposition*

Afternoon tea provided - **All welcome**

The major agenda item on the AGM will once again be the [Election of Office Bearers](#).

The term in office is for a period of two years. No less than five and no more than twelve members can be elected. Half the existing Committee must this time resign but can offer themselves for re-election.

Positions available :

* President	* Membership/ Database Secretary
* Vice Presidents (up to two)	* Minutes Secretary
* Hon Secretary	* Newspaper Editor
* Hon Treasurer	* Committee members (five in total)

Members are urged to seek positions from the above list as the work of our society requires input from all members in a position to serve and should not be left to the "same old faces". Any organization can only be successful through the active support and participation of its members, so please consider nominating.

### West Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society (Inc)

#### NOMINATION FORM FOR ELECTION TO A VACANT POSITION

**POSITION:** .....

**CANDIDATE:**

Title(s): ..... First Name: ..... Surname: .....

Address: .....

Phone: ..... Year of birth: .....

I accept nomination to the above position. ....  
(signature) (date)

**PROPOSED BY:** .....  
(name in block letters) (signature) (date)

**SECONDED BY:** .....  
(name in block letters) (signature) (date)

## Report: *Voluntary Euthanasia Forum*

A forum on the subject of voluntary euthanasia was held at the Ethics Centre at Christchurch Grammar School on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of June. The event was organized by Past President Ranjan Ray in collaboration with Teresa Scott of the Ethics Centre and was moderated by the Rev Canon Frank Sheehan.

The speakers **not** in favour of VE were Philosopher Dr Phillip Mathews from the University of Notre Dame and Professor David Watson, Consultant Physician from St John of God Hospital and University of Notre Dame.

Dr Mathews considered the matter from the philosophical aspect relying in part on the musings of philosophers such as Aristotle. His contention basically revolved around the premise that: *“It is wrong to kill an innocent man. John Smith is an innocent man, ergo it is wrong to kill John Smith.”* A rather interesting proposition given that no consideration is given to the fact that John Smith, although no doubt innocent, may have been in the throes of a painful terminal illness and actually requested help to ease his suffering.

Dr Watson on the other hand looked at the topic more as a need to provide better palliative care and maintained that it was possible by administering non-fatal doses of medication to ensure the patient a comfortable and lucid end. This would appear to run counter to conventional experience which indicates that not all severe pain can be controlled other than by the use of an induced coma.

There is obviously a reluctance by a large proportion of the medical fraternity to recognize the role they must play if patients are to receive the compassion they deserve. One can only speculate on the motive behind this attitude. Is it financial, religious or just an inability to empathize with extreme suffering, whether physical or mental ?

Speakers in favour were Past President Ranjan Ray and I. Whilst we may not have had the polished approach of the Notre Dame lecturers, I felt we were able to present the usual strong arguments in favour of an end-of- life choice familiar to you all.

The talks were followed by a lively discussion between the speakers and members of the audience. During this discussion Dr Jane Power from Notre Dame tried to throw doubt on the veracity of the many polls that have been taken on the subject of VE and suggested that a Referendum be held on the subject.

This point was picked up on by us and if supported as a Referendum would put the current poll results beyond doubt.

I have written to Dr Power and suggested that a joint approach to the Government be made by WAVES, The University of Notre Dame and the AMA, to hold such a Referendum at the earliest available time.

**I am waiting for a positive response but not with bated breath !**

The Forum was concluded by our moderator the Rev Canon Frank Sheehan, who made a closing comment along the lines that elderly people are anxious and worried about their end and are looking for answers.

Let's hope they get them !

The turnout was a little disappointing although I'm happy to say that our representation was far better than that of The University of Notre Dame. Clearly any future functions of this nature will need wider publicity to ensure a larger and more diverse audience.

*Murray Hindle*

Ed note: In the manner of Aristotle, isn't the following syllogism also true:

*“It is wrong to ignore the enduring wish of a dying man to be assisted to die gently and quickly. John Smith is a dying man, ergo it is wrong not to assist John Smith.”*



## NEWS Update

### **Swiss people give thumbs up to compassionate help to the terminally ill**

A people's initiative, which aimed at making any assistance in a self-determined end in life a criminal act, was massively disapproved by 84.5% of votes. The actual voting was 234,956 against and 43,165 for the proposition.

A second people's initiative, which would have banned accompanied suicide in the Canton of Zurich for individuals who had not resided there for at least one year, was also defeated by 218,602 against and 60,186 for (78.4% against and 21.6% for).

While this is welcome news, it is believed that there are further attempts afoot in the Swiss Federal Parliament to restrict assisted suicide, particularly for foreigners.

Switzerland is the only country where assisted suicide is legal as long as there is no financial benefit to the helper.

It is surprising that our parliamentarians find it so hard to bring about such enlightened changes to our criminal code. This humane, compassionate and generous attitude is all the more poignant when you read the following news from England.

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### **Stroke victim pleads: "For pity's sake, let my wife murder me."**

Extract from The Times of London as quoted in Weekend Australian, 23-24 July 2011:

Tony Nicklinson suffered a stroke while on a holiday in Greece in 2005. Doctors battled to save him, but when he came out of hospital it was in a body that no longer responded to his requests. He has locked-in syndrome - he cannot write, type or communicate in any conventional way. All he can do, stuck entirely conscious in the prison of his body, is move his eyes. He communicates, laboriously, through a computerised voice synthesiser with eye-ball tracking software.

"I decided that I wanted to take my own life in the autumn of 2007", he says, "and I haven't

changed my mind yet". Ever since then, he has been waiting to die. Last year he began a legal case to speed up the process.

Apart from his condition, Tony is in rude health. "Tony is so disabled he cannot do anything by himself", his wife Jane says. "It's not assisted suicide he requires; it's actual murder". She means this in the legal sense: murder, in English law, is murder, irrespective of motive."

As it stands now, English law (and it is the same in Australia) does not allow Tony to die with his wife's help. It is legal for him to commit suicide, but not legal for his wife, or anyone else, to help him. Unfortunately, the English justice system does not allow for compassion.

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### **Sir Terry Pratchett: Choosing To Die**

Sir Terry Pratchett, the 62-year-old British author of the *Discworld* comic fantasy novels, has made an emotional plea for the right to take his own life, saying: "I live in hope I can jump before I am pushed."

The subject of legalised euthanasia is a personal one for Pratchett, who announced in 2007 that he was suffering from early-onset Alzheimer's disease, a condition he refers to as his "embuggerance".

Like with many, his views are shaped by personal experience, in his case his father. He was quoted saying: "If you see me with pipes and tubes sticking out all over me, I'm no good to anyone - tell them to switch me off. I wasn't able to do it for my dad, but I would sure as hell hope someone will do it for me."

Wanting to know whether he might be able to end his life before his disease takes over, he produced a documentary about the various choices open to him. Travelling to the Dignitas Clinic in Switzerland, he witnessed first hand the procedures set out for assisted death, and confronted the point at which he would have to take the lethal drug.

DO watch his moving documentary : <http://topdocumentaryfilms.com/terry-pratchett-choosing-to-die/>

## Letters to the Editor

Members will remember **Ann David**, WAVES' committee member and frequent contributor of articles to this newsletter, who, to our regret, moved to New Zealand in 2008.

She was a staunch supporter of our cause ... and still is, as her email of 9th July 2011 testifies:

*"Dear Friends,*

*I've now been resident in NZ for 2.5 years. It seems a lifetime on the one hand and only months on the other. Having been dormant on matters VE for the first 18 months, I re-entered the fray about a year ago when I requested a meeting with the MP in my electorate - Colin King.*

*He represents the National party (currently in Government and likely to get in again at the November 2011 elections).*

*I asked him to bring a Bill forward in Parliament. He blew hot and cold on the idea but finally said he'd be willing to do so provided he could be convinced that the people in our electorate supported it.*

*He doubted they would: "very conservative around these parts ", he said.*

*Anyhow, I have embarked on a few speaking engagements to 'test the waters' and give him feedback. Local Rotary Clubs and the University of the Third Age have been the most welcoming, but I have only undertaken one speaking event to date. At the end I asked the (very small) audience if they'd allow me to conduct a poll - they were 100% in favour. "Very conservative" my foot!*

*I am hoping to be able to repeat that kind of response with the larger clubs where I have speaking engagements in August.*

*Warmest regards, Ann"*

Thanks, Ann! Good on you for forging ahead, no matter what. Please, keep us informed of developments? You are an inspiration to us all!

PS: Ann also referred to a good news article about NZ Prime Minister John Key, which can be accessed:

<http://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/5257731/John-Key-supports-euthanasia-legislation-review>

### **Please, let me die like a dog?**

#### **A short injection, no pain and no suffering!**

That is the humane way to end life,  
but at present only reserved for animals.

We don't put dogs into old age homes but sadly our fathers and mothers, our grandfathers and grandmothers, where they must linger, some for years, bedridden, with painful bed sores, incontinent, with pain and endless suffering, often having lost their minds.

Some religious leaders tell us that suffering is good for us! Remember, that until 200 years ago, these same leaders burnt people alive at the stake, being alive while the fire was lit under their feet. ENOUGH!

We have the right to die with dignity at the time of our own choosing. Therefore, on request, medicines, like Nembutal, should be available from our physician. Then we can depart in peace, just like our dogs who are put to sleep when a good life is not further option for them.

To this end we need new legislation from our government. Unlike other requests, this new legislation saves money; money that is urgently needed to provide tertiary education for the next generation.

With this new legislation people can look forward to an old age without being afraid of the many horrors which could lie ahead. For we all know that death will come and give us peace.

*Trudi Thompson*

#### **VALE Dr Jack Kevorkian**

Dr Jack Kevorkian (1928-2011) may not have been very well-known in Western Australia, but among the supporters of voluntary euthanasia he was known as somewhat of a trail blazer.

A firm believer in one's right to die, he practised what he preached. A bad law was not going to stop him and he made no secret of the fact that he helped scores of patients who did not want to suffer and wanted to die peacefully.

He managed to remain one step ahead of the law until at the end the law caught up with him.

He was convicted of man slaughter after his action in helping a patient was broadcast on television and he served eight years in prison, but never resiled from his belief that a peaceful death is everyone's right and it should not be denied to anyone.



# Notice Board

## *Membership Subscriptions*

We remind members that our current membership year runs from 1 July 2011 to 30 June 2012.

You may want to check if you are overdue with your subscription payment - **the date of expiry will be shown on the address label** of your copy of WAVES NEWS. Your co-operation in settling overdue accounts is much appreciated.

When paying directly into WAVES' Bank account, please, make sure to notify us? Otherwise we have no way of knowing who has paid and for what – subscription or donation. Send us a copy of your bank receipt, or simply email or post us the details: your full name, address and details of payment: subscription/ donation, period.

Cheques, of course, are most welcome, but do not send cash. Also let us know if you require a receipt, as we normally do not issue one.

## *Retired and itching to work?*

Looking for something meaningful to do? Come and join us on the Committee.

WAVES' current Committee will step down and new nominations will be invited at the AGM in October this year. We hope to be able to give our committee members a well-earned break and to welcome many enthusiastic applicants to continue the good work.

All you need is commitment, willingness to learn new things (if need be) and to be prepared to work as part of a team.

If you are passionate about VE law reform, then this is your chance to make it happen. A nomination form is enclosed - see page 5. For more information phone 9387 5126

## **West Australian Voluntary Euthanasia Society (Inc)**

PO Box 7243, Cloisters Square, Perth 6850 – Phone 9387 5126

Email: [info@waves.org.au](mailto:info@waves.org.au)

## **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL FORM**

Membership year runs from 1st of July to 30th of June of the following year

### **Standard Rates**

- Single \$ 20
- Double \$ 30
- Life Single \$ 200
- Life Double \$ 300
- Donation \$ .....

### **Pensioner / Student Rates**

- Single \$ 15
- Double \$ 25
- Life Single \$ 150
- Life Double \$ 250

(Rates effective from 1st July 2009)

Payable to WAVES at the above address or at any BankWest branch:

Account **WAVES - BSB no: 306-061, account no: 419 8239.**

Please complete this form and forward it to us, or bring it with you to the meeting.

Mr&Mrs    Mr    Mrs    Ms    Miss    Dr

Please print clearly

Initials ..... Surname .....

Address .....

Postcode ..... Phone ..... Year of birth: .....

Email .....

## EXIT News

EXIT International welcomes WAVES' members to join their organisation and points out that only Exit members are allowed to attend the meetings.

Please phone Carol O'Neil on 0429 039 167 for further details.



W.A.V.E.S has no religious, professional or political affiliation. Its membership comprises a wide range of people - some from a variety of professions, including medical

and nursing; some from religious denominations and some politicians. Many have publicly expressed their support for the legalisation of voluntary euthanasia, both passive and active.

### PARTICIPATE IN OUR CAUSE

You can help us make  
Voluntary Euthanasia a legal choice.  
Explain it to your friends and family.  
Write, phone or visit your State MP.

**Make your views known !**

### WEST AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTARY EUTHANASIA SOCIETY (Inc)

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#### *Management Committee 2011*

President: Murray Hindle

Vice-President: Ranjan Ray

Hon Secretary: David Kelly

Hon Treasurer: Tina Christensen

#### *Committee Members*

David Hounsome, Liz Mackie, Helen Le Cordier,

Bill O'Brien (Dir YLR), Brian Ross, Stephen Walker

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