MONTANA BECOMES THIRD U.S. STATE FOR AID IN DYING

Thanks to a decision by the Montana Supreme Court in the Baxter case (see last issue of the WF Newsletter), from a case developed by Kathryn Tucker, Legal Affairs Director for Compassion & Choices, doctors are able provide assistance in dying to terminally ill patients. The first person has died with medication under the law. However, legislators in Montana are prepared to introduce legislation that would overturn the court’s decision. Compassion and Choices will continue to defend the decision although there are currently no legislative guidelines to govern the practice as there are in Oregon and Washington.

Steve Johnson, 72, of Helena, Montana writes to ask his fellow citizens to reject the passage of state laws that would outlaw assisted suicide. These are excerpts from his statement:

I have spoken with my doctor about what is likely to happen as my brain cancer progresses. I am now fairly disabled and it is likely that I will go blind. I am very concerned about intense pain and loss of dignity as the cancer worsens.... I want my physician to be able to respect and honor my choice to die with dignity... Even though I don’t know whether or not I would ultimately take medication to end my life peacefully, I’d like to have the choice.

SOCIETY FOR OLD AGE RATIONAL SUICIDE (SOARS) LAUNCHED WITH SURVEY

The Society for Old Age Rational Suicide (SOARS) was established in December last year by a dozen right-to-die activists and humanists in Brighton and Hove, a city on the south coast of England – where, as its first project, a telephone survey of 1000 residents was commissioned to be conducted by a national polling organization.

The exciting result of this poll was that on the specific question as to whether mentally competent, very elderly adults, suffering from various non-terminal health problems should be legally allowed to have a physician-assisted suicide, 67% were in agreement, and only 18% disagreed, with the remaining 15% being uncertain. This degree of support was far greater than had been expected, especially as this particular question had never been asked before in any UK poll.

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SOARS
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The basic rationale for SOARS’ existence is a 2002 statement from the European Court of Human Rights which said that in an era of growing medical sophistication, combined with longer life expectancies, many people are concerned that they should not be forced to linger on in old age or in states of advanced physical or mental decrepitude, which conflict with strongly held ideas of self and personal identity.

The SOARS logo is the derelict remains of the West pier in Brighton, once a place of great excitement and pleasure.

At present Michael Irwin is the coordinator of this group. The first annual SOARS guest lecture event, will be held in the late summer. See www.soars.com for details.

WASHINGTON STATE LAW NOW ONE YEAR OLD

Dr. Tom Preston and Arline Hinckley from Compassion & Choices met with the press to talk about the first year of physician-assisted suicide in Washington. Opponents of the law predicted that it would spawn “Dr. Deaths,” who would rubber stamp requests for life-ending medication. “That hasn’t happened,” said Preston, a cardiologist. “Sixty-three prescriptions were written by 53 different physicians,” he said. “The ‘prescription mills’ have not occurred in Washington or Oregon.”

CONFERENCE CONTINUES IN WELLINGTON

The inaugural Dignity NZ Trust National Conference on Assisted Dying “Dignity Havens - from Concept to Reality” is scheduled to take place on October 14th and 15th in Wellington, New Zealand. Drawing on international and NZ national speakers, the conference focuses on bringing together all relevant professionals and interested parties to discuss assisted dying on a level not experienced in New Zealand to date.

Although this conference is not an extension of the World Federation Conference as such, it has been scheduled specifically to provide World Federation delegates attending the Melbourne Conference with the opportunity to extend their travel, not only to participate in a conference focused on a practical pathway to our mutual goals, but also to enjoy all that New Zealand has to offer.

The dates of October 14th and 15th were selected in order to give World Federation delegates time to relocate from Melbourne, Australia, to Wellington, NZ, and relax a little between conferences. The conference venue is the Michael Fowler Centre, with a capacity of 1,035 delegates in classroom seating, NZ’s premier conference facility.

See www.dignitynz.co.nz

WORLD CONFERENCE

This is your last notice before the October biennial World Federation conference in charming, ethnically diverse Melbourne. You can find how to register, as well as more details about the conference, on the website of Dying with Dignity Victoria: www.dwdv.org.au

Explore one of the world’s most livable cities – the cultural capital of Australia. There are elegant restaurants, ethnic cafes, funky lanes, wineries, hiking trails, beaches, the Great Ocean Road – and much more!

Each member society is entitled to two delegates and one vote. Delegates do not have to pay the registration fee. Anyone else – whether affiliated with a member society or not – is welcome to register and attend all meetings that are not board meetings of the World Federation. The program will be very exciting, and will bring you up to date about international RTD developments.

Included in the program is a NuTech meeting Saturday morning, which will be open to all, though it is a separate event sponsored by ERGO. The speakers will include Dick MacDonald, Neal Nicol, George Eighmey, Russel Ogden, Dick Côté and others.

The Public Symposium Day is Friday, October 8, the program for which is on the web page.

Meet the World Federation Board, one of whom is our host, Dr. Rodney Syme, Dying with Dignity Victoria, author of “A Good Death,” and a passionate fighter for physician aid in dying.
DUTCH ASSISTED DYING FOR THE ELDERLY GAINS SUPPORT

A campaign to give elderly people in the Netherlands the right to assisted dying has gathered more than 100,000 signatures, hoping to push the boundaries another notch in the country that first legalized euthanasia. The signatures are enough to force a debate in parliament, where it is certain to face resistance. Even if widely approved, the proposal would normally go through a lengthy process of committee work and consensus-building that could take years.

Spokeswoman, Marie-Jose Grotenhuis of the “Of Free Will” campaign, said the group had hoped for the 40,000 signatures needed to bring the idea to parliament when it launched its initiative in February. So far it has received 112,500 signatures, in a country of 16 million. The group proposes training non-doctors to administer a lethal potion to people over the age of 70, who “consider their lives complete” and want to die. The assistants would need to be certified, and make sure that patients were not acting on a whim or due to a temporary depression, but from a heartfelt and enduring desire to die.

The NVVE is of the opinion that old people should be able to make a deliberated request at their life’s end. People don’t have to make use of the opportunities for help in assisted suicide, but they do have to have the choice.

BERNICE PACKFORD: “I am tired and ready to go now.”

Canada’s Maclean’s Magazine interviewed Bernice Packford, a 95-year-old Victoria social activist, who sparked Canadian discussion about the right to die when she wrote to the Victoria Times that she was “tired and ready to go.” She was found dead in her home March 15. A reader wrote in saying “She was a rock, an anchor, a character, and a flag of compassion for anyone lucky enough to come across her. Thank you, Bernice, for everything you did.... You were one of a kind, and it was an honour to know you.”

BAD/SAD LOVING DEATHS; JUDICIAL DECISIONS VARIABLE

Austin Texas: Kim Yarbrough received 10 years’ probation for killing her profoundly disabled husband, and also tried to kill herself. As a result of encephalitis, Lloyd Yarbrough had lost the ability to walk, talk and perform even basic functions, such as swallowing. She said the decision to take his life with an overdose of prescription pills came in a moment of depression, frustration, exhaustion, and the overwhelming responsibility of caring for a chronically ill man. The prosecutor said, “… these people were very deeply in love, and cared tremendously for each other.”

Belfast, Northern Ireland: Billy Cousins, 58, had been in a coma after suffering a stroke in December. In June, his friend, Thomas Hawkes, was arrested at his friend’s bedside in a Belfast hospital, having allegedly held his hand over Cousins’ nose and mouth. A few weeks before Cousins suffered the stroke, the friends had made a pact that one would kill the other if they became ill with no prospect of a cure. Hawkes told police he “knew what he had to do,” and had put on his best suit before going to the hospital, “to give Billy a little dignity”, and also because he knew he would be leaving with the police. He has been charged with murder.

West Sussex, Britain: A man is believed to have killed his severely disabled wife before jumping to his death because he felt he could no longer care for her. The 71 year-old man was found in a churchyard, having leapt 80ft. from the top floor of a neighboring multi-story car park. When police went to inform his wife, they discovered her body in bed, apparently having been strangled. Detectives said they were treating the wife’s death as murder, and her husband’s as suicide.

Malvern, Worcestershire: A devoted elderly couple unable to bear living apart died by drinking home-brewed cyanide from tea cups at their dining room table. Retired physicist, Arthur Prior, 90, is believed to have brewed the deadly poison himself. He sat down with his wife of 60 years, Mary, 87, and they held hands as they sipped from the cups together, after writing suicide notes to their four children. Neighbors said that the couple were ‘inseparable,’ and could not face spending their last days apart. They had recently agreed she could be better looked after in a care home after health problems left her frail. But after she moved there, they missed each other so much, that they made the heartbreaking decision to end their lives together while she was on a visit back to their home.

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Loving Deaths
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Britain: A “loving and devoted mother,” who gave her acutely ill daughter a cocktail of drugs after handing her a morphine overdose, was today cleared of attempted murder. During a week-long trial, Kay Gilderdale, 55, had admitted assisting her daughter, Lynn, in her suicide; she was given a 12 month conditional discharge, and was allowed to walk free from court. Her 31 year-old daughter was said to have suffered an “unimaginably wretched existence” after contracting ME, a post-viral fatigue syndrome, 17 years before her death. In December 2008, she persuaded her mother to help kill her because she could not take any more pain, and her “body was broken”. Gilderdale gave her double her normal daily morphine dose, which her daughter administered herself. When the judge handed down his sentence, there was a spontaneous round of applause.

Britain: Frances Inglis, 58, was found guilty of the 2008 murder of her brain-injured 22 year-old son, who was being fed by a tube in a nursing home. She was sentenced to life imprisonment, with a minimum of 9 years in prison. The Judge told the jury, “There is no concept in law of mercy killing – it is still killing.” Since she intentionally killed her son, she met the requirements for a conviction of murder. The sentence is mandatory; the judge had no discretion. Though the motive was to end her son’s suffering, motive is irrelevant. Once the prosecution proves both the actus reus (unlawful killing of a human being) and the men’s rea (with intention to kill), that is sufficient to obtain a conviction of murder. During the trial Inglis said, “For Tom to live that living hell I couldn’t leave my child like that. I did it with love in my heart, for Tom, so I don’t see it as murder.”

Britain: More than 10 years ago, Vicki Wood tried to end the life of her husband, who was suffering from Alzheimer’s. She was given two years probation, and was not allowed to be alone with him, but she later won a legal fight to become his caregiver. He died later, in a nursing home, where he was unable to recognize his wife or do anything for himself. Recently Ms. Wood ended her life in Switzerland with the aid of Dignitas. “This is a very sad ending to two tragic stories,” the local paper wrote.

Christians for Voluntary Euthanasia claims to be the first religious organization in the world to stand on the controversial platform of support for voluntary euthanasia. They have applied for WF membership, pending approval of the Delegates in Melbourne.

Reverend Craig de Vos, a candidate for the South Australia legislature, from the group, says it is time for a balanced debate, and to help push voluntary euthanasia laws through parliament. “In some cases the best outcome for life is a dignified and good death, and at the moment, a lot of people don’t get that,” he said. Reverend de Vos is keen to revive legislation last put forward by Greens MP, Mark Parnell. He thinks ‘death with dignity’ is supported by many Christians. Another Christian group, Family First, is also standing for the Legislative Council in the South Australian election, to oppose voluntary euthanasia.

India Court Considers Plea to Not Feed Coma Victim

Aruna Shanbaug, a nurse in Mumbai, has been paralysed and in a coma since she was attacked by a rapist in November of 1973. Journalist Pinki Virani has written a book on Shanbaug, “Bitter Chocolate,” and has filed a petition with the Supreme Court of India to “forthwith ensure that no food is fed” to Shanbaug. The Supreme Court has asked for a report on Shanbaug’s condition from the Mumbai hospital and the government of Maharashtra. Some observers think this may signal a change in the Court’s forceful protection of all human life under all circumstances.
JAPAN: DOCTOR GETS SUSPENDED JAIL TERM FOR “MERCY KILLING”

The Supreme Court of Japan found Dr. Setsuko Suda, 55, guilty of murder for removing a breathing tube from a 58-year-old male patient, whose heart and lungs had stopped functioning. At the family’s request, Suda had injected a muscle relaxant to hasten the patient’s death.

The court ruled that Suda did not have the right to assist the patient’s death, saying she “was not in a position to precisely predict the likelihood of recovery or the patient’s life expectancy.” Suda said she did not accept the guilty verdict. “I don’t think it’s a crime,” she said. “In law it may be necessary to specify the life expectancy, but on the medical front, we cannot make prim and stiff decisions.”

The Japan Society for Dying with Dignity, called for clearer guidelines: “It is an urgent task to introduce a legal framework on death with dignity, so that doctors will be fully aware of (when they have) immunity and can make decisions more confidently.”

LIBERA USCITA: A SECOND ITALIAN RTD SOCIETY

by Dr. Enrico Bertrand Cattinari

Libera Uscita is a nation-wide society in Italy, not bound to a religion or a political party, that acts in favour of the right to die with dignity. It was set up in Rome in 2001, by initiative of a group of persons coming from different political parties, and formerly active for the endorsement of civil rights is a WF member.

The goals of Libera Uscita are: 1) a good living will law, and; 2) the withdrawal of the prosecution against euthanasia. Libera Uscita is present in most Italian regions, and by means of different initiatives, including the edition of books, e.g., “Non Sono un Assassino” by F. Chaussoy, which promotes the public debate on the end of life. It has a newsletter (“Il punto”) sent monthly to members. Many renowned figures are on the board of the association: Prof. Umberto Veronesi (Medicine), and Stefano Rodotà (Law), Margheritita Hack (Physicist), Mina Welby, and Mario Riccio (Physicians).

EXIT INTERNATIONAL NOW IN IRELAND

Exit International, the controversial pro-euthanasia organisation, is setting up a group in Ireland. The first advocacy group of its kind in Ireland will be headed by Dublin man Tom Curran. Curran said the association in Ireland would be a source of information and support to people interested in learning more about euthanasia and assisted suicide. He said people had a right to access information.

Curran’s partner had multiple sclerosis and, as her condition had become progressively worse, he said they had discussed options such as assisted suicide and euthanasia. Curran said the group was very much in its infancy, but planned to hold its first meeting before the end of July. He said he became involved with Exit International after attending a meeting held by Dr. Philip Nitschke, its founder. (from EuthaNEWSia)

LILACH FIGHTS FOR PALLIATIVE CARE

by Ruth Debel

The Israeli law of 2005 states that palliative care should be available to every dying patient, but palliative care is not yet recognized as a subject to be taught in Israeli medical schools. Lilach, at their annual assembly in April, has resolved to join palliative doctors in their battle to provide palliative care either in hospitals, day care palliative centres or home-care. Bina Divon will succeed Ruth Debel as Lilach chairperson.
**COURT DATES DELAYED FOR THREE WF ACTIVISTS**

Dr. Michael Irwin, a retired British doctor who paid to help a terminally-ill patient commit suicide at a Swiss clinic, is set to be the first person charged under new guidelines for assisted dying. “I expect to be charged, and I want to be charged,” Dr. Irwin stated.

Dr. Irwin is former president of the World Federation and its current Treasurer, who wants to make a test case out of his assistance in helping Raymond Cutkelvin to end his suffering three years ago, by accompanying him to Dignitas and paying £1500 to defray expenses. His bail has been extended for the 6th time, to June 30 with no reason given for the delay.

Dr. Libby Wilson, head of FATE (Friends at the End), was also arrested in 2009, under the new British guidelines, and has had her bail extended to “some date in July.”

Ted Goodwin, WF Vice President, was arrested in the American state of Georgia in February 2009, with six other volunteers from the Final Exit Network. No trials have occurred in those cases to date.

**STUDY SHOWS A THIRD OF UK DEATHS ARE HASTENED BY DOCTORS**

A well-known British researcher, Clive Seale, studying 3000 deaths, found that over a third of doctors say they have given drugs to terminally ill patients, or withdrawn treatment, knowing that it would shorten their life. Seale also reports that one in 10 patients asked their doctor to help them to die. Doctors who said they were religious or opposed the legalization of assisted dying, were less likely to report that they had acted to hasten a patient’s death.

(10/28/09 Social Science and Medicine by Clive Seale)

**GOOGLE REFUSES EUTHANASIA CENSORSHIP**

Google has refused to bow to a request by the Australian government to censor videos on YouTube, saying the move would stifle public debate on important issues, such as euthanasia and drug use.

“I don’t think people are particularly bothered about death, it’s the life before death that worries us,” Sir Terry Pratchett said in a recent BBC TV interview. The author was diagnosed two years ago with a rare form of early onset Alzheimer’s disease.

**BOOKS AND DVDS**

Here are three new books about an adult child helping his/her mother die. They are all interesting, use different methods and none rely on a professional organization.

**The Last Goodnights: Assisting My Parents with Their Suicides**


Written by an attorney and outlining every detail of the actual assisted deaths of both parents, this “memoir” is amazingly bold and daring. It is also a graphic account of how two famous, accomplished mental health professionals can be reduced to asking their son for help to end their suffering – his father from cancer, his mother, shortly afterwards, from progressive, despairing memory loss. His unflinching willingness to provide the means and give physical assistance to these two respected and beloved parents, is an argument for legalization of this act of love, and a testament to the despair of being ravaged by Alzheimer’s Disease.

**A Courageous Battle**


This is a fictional account of a daughter and her dying mother, who seek drugs in Mexico to achieve a peaceful death. The first part of the book reads much like a romance novel but the last few chapters, in which the pair try to figure out the best way for the fragile, sick mother to die, is an adventure tale which could be plausible. In addition to the novel, Bracken provides an appendix of legal information.

To get a signed author’s copy, send a cheque or money order for $19.95 to Bracken, 2 Toronto St., PH 1-3, Barrie ON L4N 9R2 (includes taxes, shipping & handling). A free PDF version can be downloaded from www.susanbracken.ca/
Imperfect Endings: A Daughter’s Tale of Life and Death
by Zoe Fitzgerald Carter, 2010
Simon and Shuster
A CD is also available.

In “Imperfect Endings,” Zoe Fitzgerald Carter has managed to describe the events of her mother’s evolving approach to death, her determination to remain at the helm of a sinking ship. More important, this sensitive and loving memoir showcases Carter’s remarkable talent for expressing her feelings under stress, and her insights into the thoughts and feelings of family members. She sets the stage clearly, and her parents, imperfect but lovable, enjoy lives of privilege and success and raise three daughters, of which the author is youngest. She outlines the impact on her sisters, her husband and her own daughters of her mother’s declining health. The book does not appear to promise a happy ending, but delivers one as the author comments, “After all those months of discussion, the false starts and failed attempts, my proud, determined mother had died on her terms, grace and dignity intact.” We should all be so lucky. This fine book details a death but celebrates life.

Reviewed by Gerald Metz, M.D. (Medical Director, Final Exit Network)

You Don’t Know Jack
an HBO movie, now available on DVD.
Pre-orders on Amazon.com

Critically acclaimed, this new movie has Al Pacino artfully playing Jack Kevorkian, with Susan Sarandon as a Hemlock Chapter leader, and John Goodman as his colleague, Neal Nicol (co-author of the book on which the movie is partly based).

Also included is actual footage of some of Dr. Kevorkian’s well known cases, including Janet Adkins, his first case in 1990, and Tom Youk, his last case, in 1998. Pacino brings out Kevorkian’s impatience, abruptness and erratic behavior, as well as his dedication, persistence, brilliance, and compassion. Love or hate the guy, the film is worth a look.

Final Acts: Death, Dying and the Choices We Make
Edited by Nan Bauer-Maglin and Donna Perry
Rutgers University Press, 2010

Edited by two English professors, this collection of 20 essays from patients, caregivers, doctors, lawyers, a poet, believers, and non-believers, presents a diversity of viewpoints on assisted dying, but also on palliative care, hospice, the medical establishment, and the government. The first part, Personal Stories, presents moving accounts of people going through dying; the second part, Perspectives, is more of what we’re used to, i.e., work by academics and experts such as Ira Byock, Kathryn Tucker and Philip Nitschke.

It’s Not Because I Want to Die
by Debbie Purdy 2010
HarperTrue

To order from The Times Bookshop go to www.timesonline.co.uk/bookshop or call 0845 271 2134. Not yet available on Amazon.com

Debbie Purdy has become famous in Great Britain for demanding protection for her foreign-born husband in case he takes her to Dignitas to die from her potentially fatal illness.
(Not yet reviewed but much heralded.)

A Finished Life: The Goodbye & No Regrets Tour
by Michelle Boyaner and Barbara Green, 2009
DVD available on Amazon.com

This documentary DVD is about the life and self-chosen death of Greg Gour, a 48-year-old gay man with AIDS. Gour stops his AIDS treatment program in 2006, because he can no longer cope with the side effects. His partner and all their friends had long since died. Gour ends all treatment, quits his job, closes up his apartment, and drives to his mom’s house in Pennsylvania to say goodbye. Along the way, he stops at various locales to visit with old friends, siblings and ex-boyfriends. At the end, Gour ends his life using helium inhalation. “With grace, dignity, and humor, he exits stage left.”

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World Right-to-Die Newsletter-7
Final Exit, edition 3.1, by Derek Humphry, 2010
Delta
ISBN 978-0-385-33653-6
www.finalexit.org/ergo-store

This is the same as the Third Edition, but included is the Addendum, a piece on the death of the Hemlock Society, and information on the Final Exit Network. This is a change of about 5% from the original with the same methods described. The new edition has a listing of states where assisted dying is legal.

EXCELLENT INTERNET RESOURCES

EuthaNEWSia mailing list
To subscribe send a message to:
euthanewsia-subscribe@euthanewsia.ca
You may leave the Subject blank and the message empty: the server only reads the From address on the message.

ERGO listserv
To subscribe visit
http://lists.opn.org/mailman/listinfo/right-to-die_lists.opn.org
or, via email, send a message with subject or body ‘help’ to right-to-die-request@lists.opn.org

www.finalexit.org/ergo-store
www.finalexit.org
www.assistedsuicide.org
videos at:
http://www.youtube.com/user/TheFinalExit

CENTURY CLUB

We are grateful for the help of these individuals who have supported the World Federation by contributing $100 or more in the first half of 2010.

James Allen  Ken Fremont-Smith
Faye Girsh    Ted Goodwin
Roland Halpern Trish Hooper
Ron Plummer  Sheila Redd
Frank Sargent

The World Federation, founded in 1980, consists of 44 Right to Die organizations from 25 countries (July, 2009). The Federation provides an international link for organizations working to secure or protect the rights of individuals to self-determination at the end of their lives.

Your contribution as a Century Club member supports the work of the World Federation. Write a check for the equivalent of US $100 or more – in any currency.

Individuals may subscribe to this Newsletter for US $10/year for two issues or $18 for two years. Copies are sent gratis to all member organizations and associate members.

If U.S. currency is not convenient, the WF can accept the equivalent in other currency. Send checks or money orders to:

Michael Irwin, Treasurer        Faye Girsh, Editor
9 Waverleigh Rd., Cranleigh    7811 Eads Ave., #108
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England  USA

See www.worldrtd.net for more information.
The editor can be contacted at fayegirsh@msn.com.

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