

INTERNATIONAL PROGRESS

Victoria, Australia and Hawaii, USA are the latest states to pass assisted dying laws. They are based on the Oregon model, which restricts help to those who are within 6 months of dying. Unfortunately this excludes many who are suffering intolerably and incurably such as people like Omid and those with dementia. We welcome the progress in Victoria and Hawaii as a first step. Victoria extends the 6-month criterion to 12 months in the case of neurodegenerative diseases. (A more general 12-month condition was voted down during their parliamentary debate.)

Iceland too is considering legislation, but they appear to favour the broader Dutch model.

We note with interest reports of efforts to extend the legislation in Oregon and Canada. For more details see: www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk/extending-the-oregon-right-to-die-law-evidence-of-a-slippery-slope/.

LEGAL CHALLENGE – Omid

The latest hearing of Omid's legal case took place on 7th/8th March. Omid's legal team argued for the right to cross-examine expert witnesses – in particular to question the written evidence given by Baroness Ilora Finlay, the primary expert witness brought by the crown to oppose Omid's claim, and an outspoken opponent to any change in the law on assisted suicide. The court decided to "adjourn our ruling on this preliminary issue until the judgement in Conway is known..."

Meanwhile, those who have met Omid recently describe how he has become more desperate for an ending to his suffering. He has become disillusioned by the legal process.

MDMD continue to give Omid our support, but sympathise with his frustration and suffering.

A more detailed description of the case is available here:

www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk/the-courts-may-be-able-to-wait-but-omid-cant/

LEGAL CHALLENGE – NOEL CONWAY

In the last newsletter we reported that the legal case for Noel Conway, (who suffers from MND), was rejected by the High Court on 5th October last year. On 18th January he was granted permission to appeal this decision. The next stage is on-going as this is written (1st May). The Conway case differs from Omid's as it is restricted to those who are terminally ill and have a life expectancy of six months or less. His lawyer is quoted as saying "The question for this court is rather a focused one of whether for this very specific cohort, ie, terminally ill people with less than six months to live, the ban is justifiable because of an impact on the weak and vulnerable." MDMD wish Noel every success. Progress for this "very specific cohort" would be a very important step.

GUERNSEY - A FIRST STEP FOR THE UK?

Guernsey could become the first place in the British Isles to allow assisted dying. Proposals will be voted on in May. If passed, this will lead to a consultation phase. The campaign is backed by the Chief Minister for Guernsey, Gavin St Pier. Although this would be a very interesting development, it would not help people in the rest of the UK as the proposed law will only apply to those living there. The legislation currently being discussed is based on the Oregon model, limited to people who are terminally ill with a life expectation of six months or less. Like the Conway case, any progress would be a very useful first step.

MDMD/FATE MEETING APRIL 14TH

The hall was full to hear Richy Thompson from Humanists UK and Heather Williams of Friends at the End talk about the work of their respective organisations. Richy gave a clear overview of the legal cases around assisted dying over the past 16 years. He put the contributions of Diane Pretty, Debbie Purdy, Tony Nicklinson, Paul Lamb, Noel Conway and Omid T. in context, explaining how they were challenging Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights.

Heather then discussed the work FATE are doing in Scotland. Unlike in England and Wales, there is no specific crime of assisting suicide. Two recent cases of people helping others to die have been quashed. FATE believe cases like these show the failings of the Scottish law. It is untenable to leave it to the Court and Sheriffs to decide individual cases. FATE is working closely with MSPs and is providing the secretariat for a new cross party group on assisted dying. Slides, description and audio of the talks are available here:

www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk/info/lectures/april-2018-huk-fate-lecture/

The Q&As which followed demonstrated the very similar objectives of MDMD, FATE and HumanistsUK. Over the past year our 3 organisations have been working increasingly closely on right to die issues.

MDMD AGM APRIL 14th – NEW PATRONS

6 new patrons were appointed at the AGM, in addition to our founding patron Dr. Michael Irwin. The new patrons are:

Prof. A C Grayling (Prof. of Philosophy at Birkbeck, Univ. London until 2011. Master of the New College of the Humanities. Supernumerary Fellow of St Anne's College, Oxford)

Canon Rosie Harper (Church of England vicar and member of General Synod)

Virginia Ironside (Writer, Journalist and Columnist)

Baron Rees of Ludlow (Astronomer Royal since 1995. Master of Trinity College, Cambridge 2004-12. President of Royal Society 2005-10. Crossbencher in the House of Lords since 2005)

Baroness Richardson of Calow, OBE (First female President of the Methodist Conference 1992-93. Crossbencher in the House of Lords since 1998)

Polly Toynbee (Journalist, Writer and Columnist)

We are delighted that these high profile figures from a range of influential positions are now openly supporting the MDMD approach.

This year's AGM also reported progress on moving MDMD into a more formal organisation. The need for incorporation was discussed in the 2017 AGM. Initial work on this demonstrated the prior need for a larger team with a broader range of skills. Considerable work has gone into building such a team. Our expanded Executive Council has 8 members with a good range of skills and backgrounds, capable of taking the organisation forward. The EC is supported by a further 12 or so volunteers who provide various forms of administrative support.

FROM OUR WEBSITE...

New stories on our website provide thoughtful comment on right-to-die issues, promoting a serious discussion of the underlying issues. Some of the new articles added to our website include:

Discussion of some critical cases concerning how the Dutch euthanasia legislation is working:

www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk/is-the-dutch-euthanasia-law-working-as-intended/

A case where an advance decision would have saved a family having to go to court to allow a relative in a minimally conscious state to die. Have you written your advance decision yet??:

www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk/right-turn-off-life-support/

A follow up interview with Alzheimer's sufferer, and MDMD campaigner Alex Pandolfo, who has the green light for an assisted death in Switzerland at a time of his choosing.

www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk/living-dementia-comparing-two-cases-early-onset-dementia/

An excellent report produced for Dignity in Dying on how the UK outsources assisted dying to Switzerland. Although the report focusses on cases where people are terminally ill, within six months of dying, much of the underlying research and issues has much wider implications.

www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk/new-report-outsourcing-assisted-dying-switzerland/

If you'd like to be kept up to date with new stories as they are added to our website, follow us on Twitter (@MDMDmydecision) or Facebook (MyDeathMyDecision). New stories are shared on social media.

NEXT LONDON MEETING – We are moving to a larger room (again)

The next FATE/MDMD meeting will be held at 2pm on **Saturday 13th October 2018** in the Sarah Fell Room at Friends' House, 173-177 Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ. Professor A C Grayling CBE, one of MDMD's newly appointed patrons, will be speaking on "*Choosing to Have the Life and Its End that Belongs to You.*" A C Grayling is Master of the New College of the Humanities, a Supernumerary Fellow of St Anne's College, Oxford and also Vice President of Humanists UK. Please note that *advance registration for this meeting is essential*. Registration details will be sent to supporters in due course.

QUOTES

"There is no palliative care that can help me. My life is beyond that"

OMID T Nov 2017 www.crowdjustice.com/case/dignified-death/

"If the time comes, and it is necessary for me, I would find it a fulfilment of my life of faith to be able to say to God: 'Loving Father I thank you for the most wonderful gift of life. The burden of it is now too much for me to bear and so with every ounce of love and gratitude I can muster I give it back to you.'"

Rev Canon Rosie Harper, chaplain to the Bishop of Buckingham and a member of the Church of England's General Synod. Appointed Patron of MDMD April 2018. Published in Christian Today www.christiantoday.com/article/a-time-to-die-why-i-believe-in-the-right-to-chooseexecute1/122912.htm

"The BMJ supports the legalisation of assisted dying. The great majority of the British public are in favour and there is now good evidence it works well in other parts of the world."

Dr Fiona Godlee, Editor-in-Chief, The British Medical Journal

www.bmj.com/company/newsroom/case-for-assisted-dying-stronger-than-ever-says-the-bmj/

You can contact us by email to mail@mydeath-mydecision.org.uk