



EXAMPLES OF OLD AGE RATIONAL SUICIDE

Last November, John, 85 years old, who had been a supporter of SOARS since February 2011, received a doctor-assisted suicide in Zurich: he had been suffering severely from progressive Parkinson's disease and deafness.

In March, Rita, also from London and a supporter of SOARS, with a history of cancer and heart disease, and now increasingly suffering, at the age of 88, from deafness and impaired vision, died in Bern, with the assistance of EX International.

Also, in March, Tom, 87, with advanced Parkinson's disease, was helped to rewrite his advance decision so that, with very specific statements, his personal doctor in Somerset would soon be able to provide continuous deep sedation.

MEETINGS

SOARS was represented, last November, at an event at London University's Senate House, for "The Day of the Dead", organized by the Dying Matters coalition, which is based on the Mexican "Dia de los Muertos" - a festival, dating back hundreds of years, to remember, honour and celebrate the dead.

In February, SOARS participated in the opening event, in London, of the Dying Matters' Awareness Week.

At the end of March, SOARS and FATE (Friends At The End) organized a well-attended public meeting in London which provided practical information on how someone (terminally ill; severely disabled; or very elderly, with a medical problem) could travel today from the UK to Switzerland for a doctor-assisted suicide there, with the help of either Dignitas (in Zurich) or EX International (in Bern) - all those present received a copy of the recently revised FATE "UK Guide to Dignitas" (a couple of years ago, the distribution of such a booklet would have been illegal). Also, on this occasion, there was a mini-seminar on the preparation and revision of advance decisions.



OTHER UK ACTIVITIES

In December, a twelve-page report (“The First Two Years”), on SOARS’ activities since the organization’s formation in December 2009, was produced for distribution at various meetings in 2012.

During the past six months, talks on SOARS have been given in Brighton, Canterbury, London and Oxford.

Information on SOARS has appeared in several publications, such as - “EXIT”, the journal of the right-to-die organization of the same name, which is based in Edinburgh (in November); a mini-ebook “Beyond Final Exit”, produced by the Euthanasia Research and Guidance Organization (ERGO), which is based in Oregon, USA (in November); the student magazine of the University of the West of Scotland (in January); and in the January copy of “Issues Today”, entitled “Voluntary Euthanasia”, produced by Independence Educational Publishers (in Cambridge), which is distributed to schools throughout the UK.

Nine radio interviews were given in December, January and March on BBC Kent, BBC Surrey Sussex, BBC Sussex, and on LBC - relating to specific media events during these months.

Whenever possible, SOARS promotes the importance of advance decisions (especially, stressing the need to keep these up-to-date) - one particular example was an extensive article on this subject in the March Newsletter of the British Association of Former United Nations Civil Servants (Michael Irwin, the SOARS Co-ordinator, was the UN Medical Director, in New York, from 1982 to 1989).

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

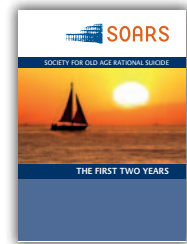
In the last few months of 2011, the Supreme Court of British Columbia, in Canada, was considering the application for doctor-assisted suicide from an individual who had advanced MND. To help this plaintiff, Michael Irwin was asked to provide an “expert witness” statement: in this, he highlighted the advantages of the “Swiss model” for a doctor-assisted suicide compared to that presently available in Oregon and Washington State.

Last December, Michael Irwin was elected, for two years, to the Board of Right-to-Die Europe, a coalition of twenty-two right-to-die national societies in Europe.

In March, there was an initial discussion in the Dutch parliament on a bill (“Dying Assistance for the Elderly”) presented by Uit Vrije Wil (“One’s Own Free Will”), an organization which has some similar objectives to SOARS - this followed a citizens’ initiative in which nearly 120,000 individuals had signed a petition in 2010. The main Dutch right-to-die organization, NVVE (the Dutch Association for a Voluntary End of Life), fully supports this campaign, and on its website can be seen various letters it has received supporting old age rational suicide. Also, on the website of the World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies, there is an English translation (funded by SOARS) of a report on the activities of Uit Vrije Wil during the past two years.

FUTURE ACTIVITIES

In particular, during the coming months, SOARS will be represented at the biennial conference of the World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies in Zurich, in June; will be attending both the Green Party autumn conference in Bristol and also the Liberal Democrats autumn conference in Brighton, in September; and will be sponsoring the Third Annual SOARS Lecture in London, in October.



USEFUL QUOTES

“The cost of our ageing population has been calculated to be an extra £80 billion a year in 50 years’ time - double the defence budget”

from an article in The Daily Telegraph, November 19, 2011

“The increase in life expectancy has not been matched by an increase in healthy life expectancy”

– from a report by the International Longevity Centre UK, quoted in The Sunday Times, November 27, 2011

In answer to the question, “Have you come to terms with the idea of death”, Lewis Wolpert, aged 80, the Emeritus Professor of Cell and Developmental Biology at University College London, replied “It’s a very strange business although as a biologist it makes total sense. We’re only here in order to reproduce. You can go on but you have no real function as you age. Evolution doesn’t give a hoot about you except for looking after children”

– quoted in The Oldie magazine, in February 2012.

“The Office for National Statistics said that the number of female centenarians (in the UK) could hit 276,000 by 2060, while the number of male centenarians would be 179,000”

- from a report in The Daily Telegraph, March 27, 2012.

“We are not so much living in an age of crisis as facing a crisis of age.....The rapid ageing of the (UK) population represents a great economic and social transformation. There are more people over 65 than under 16. In future, the numbers aged over 65 will be far greater than now, and whereas until fairly recently four people of working age supported every pensioner, that ratio is set to decline dramatically”

- the main editorial in The Daily Telegraph, April 13, 2012.

Finally, on the SOARS website, links have been added for easy connection to the websites of Dignitas, EX International, and Right-to-Die Europe.

