



### INCREMENTAL STEPS TOWARDS OLD AGE RATIONAL SUICIDE

While the present parliamentary efforts in England and Wales are focused on legalizing doctor-assisted suicide for those who are terminally ill (in Scotland, legislators there will soon be considering a draft Bill which will also include individuals who find “their lives intolerable”), there have been three separate recent public occasions when the possibility of doctor-assisted suicide for those who are very elderly, suffering from various medical problems, has been considered.

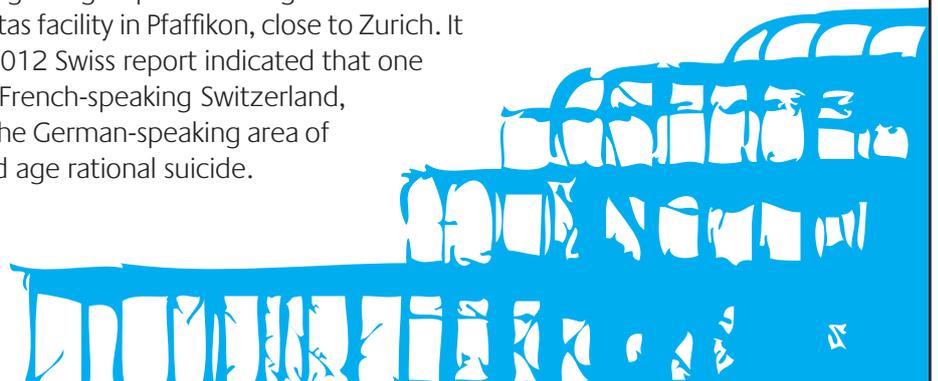
On September 5th, Michael Irwin, the SOARS Co-ordinator, received general support for old age rational suicide when he spoke at a meeting, in Brussels, of the European Parliament Platform for Secularism in Politics on the possibility of changing the law in the UK (a summary of this talk appeared on this group’s website). Then, at a debate in the Oxford Union, on October 18th, there was a vote of 167 to 139 in support of legalizing “Assisted Dying”, which Michael Irwin stressed, during this debate, should include old age rational suicide and assistance for the severely disabled. Finally, the Third Annual SOARS Lecture, given in London on October 26th, focused on how Switzerland provides doctor-assisted suicide for those who are terminally ill, severely disabled, and suffering elderly individuals.

Of course, the “anti-choice lobby” regards such incremental steps towards old age rational suicide as a “slippery slope”. But, some “slopes” can be beneficial. Many years ago, only rich, male landowners could vote in UK parliamentary elections. Some of them, at that time, would have regarded an extension of this franchise to other men to be a “slippery slope”. Fortunately, later, it was decided that women over 30 should also have the vote: then, all adults over 21 were able to vote: and today, all those over 18 can vote. On each occasion, Parliament decided that such changes were necessary. Perhaps, after doctor-assisted suicide becomes legalized for those who are terminally ill (in 2016 or 2017?), a future English Parliament will later approve doctor-assisted suicide for competent individuals who unfortunately become severely disabled, and then progress, in another year, to the possibility of old age rational suicide?

### SOARS PRESENCE AT VARIOUS CONFERENCES

In mid-June, Angela Farmer, Michael Irwin and Liz Nichols, all representing SOARS, were in Zurich for the biennial conference of the World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies. On this occasion, SOARS was admitted to full membership in this international organization (it had been an interim member since February 2011). This four-day meeting allowed for SOARS to have several one-to-one discussions with delegates from the various Dutch and Swiss right-to-die societies: following the example of Switzerland, The Netherlands is beginning to permit old age rational suicide.

Also, a visit was made to the Dignitas facility in Pfaffikon, close to Zurich. It is interesting to note that a May 2012 Swiss report indicated that one in five doctor-assisted suicides in French-speaking Switzerland, and one in three such suicides in the German-speaking area of this country, were examples of old age rational suicide.



On June 24th, SOARS participated in a fringe debate on “Assisted Dying” at the BMA Annual Representatives Meeting (also, at the same location, a representative was present at the AGM of the Secular Medical Forum).

Michael Irwin was a delegate at the Autumn Green Party conference, in Bristol, in early September - he participated in a plenary session on “Choosing to die - the Law, your Rights and the campaign for Dignity at the End of Life”, as well as a fringe meeting on End-of-Life Palliative Care, stressing the importance of advance decisions. SOARS was also admitted to the Liberal Democrats conference in Brighton in late September where there was a generally positive debate on “Medically Assisted Dying”. It is important to remember that a majority in both of these political parties support doctor-assisted dying.

### **THIRD ANNUAL SOARS LECTURE**

On October 26th, this lecture was given, in London, by Silvan Luley, from Dignitas. In his talk, he described the present philosophy and activities of this organization, ranging from suicide prevention to fortunately helping non-Swiss citizens “who are suffering from a terminal condition...people who are suffering due to a severe disability...elderly people whose life has become too arduous as the result of a multitude of ailments related to old age”. So far, in the past ten years, 217 Britons have received a doctor-assisted suicide in Zurich with the help of Dignitas. And, at the present time, there are 899 members of Dignitas living in the UK (out of about 6,500 members around the world, in 70 different countries) - such membership represents a form of “insurance policy”.

An exclusive report on this event appeared in The Sunday Times on October 28th. A summary of Silvan Luley’s lecture can be seen on the SOARS website ([www.soars.org.uk](http://www.soars.org.uk)) under “Annual Lecture”.

### **SPREADING THE WORD FROM PRESTON TO BOURNEMOUTH**

During these six months, talks were given, on old age rational suicide, to various groups in Bournemouth, Bristol, London and Preston. At the meeting in Preston, on July 18th, organized by the Lancashire Secular Humanists, a video was made of the complete event which can be shown at future meetings.

### **MEDIA ACTIVITIES**

Radio interviews - when consideration of old age rational suicide was discussed - occurred on June 26th (“Voice of Russia” - Russian World Service), August 23rd (BBC Kent, and LBC), and October 1st (BBC Wales). The national Irish TV network, RTE, broadcast a one-hour documentary on October 15th in which Michael Irwin was interviewed discussing the doctor-assisted suicide of his former colleague, Nan Maitland, in Switzerland in March 2011 (Nan, in her 85th year, was increasingly suffering from extensive osteoarthritis).

Press statements on the last national opinion poll results (obtained in March 2011), in support of old age rational suicide, continue to appear in various newspapers, ranging from The Sunday Times (July 15th) to the Surrey Advertiser (August 3rd) - the next biennial national opinion poll is expected to take place in Spring 2013. Quotes by Michael Irwin, in support of doctor-assisted suicide, appeared in The Observer (June 24th), The Freethinker (July issue), and the Daily Mirror (August 17th).

### **DRAFT ASSISTED DYING BILL (FOR ENGLAND AND WALES)**

SOARS submitted detailed comments, in late July, on this draft Bill during the public consultation process which was organized by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Choice at the End of Life. It is expected that this Bill will be presented in the House of Lords early next year.

## USEFUL QUOTES

*“The first formal organization to advocate the ‘completed life’ concept came into being in 2009, when the British euthanasia activist Dr. Michael Irwin founded the Society for Old Age Rational Suicide (SOARS)”*

**Page 235 of “In Search of Gentle Death” by Richard Cote, published in the USA in May 2012**

*“I would far rather end my life quietly and easily than have strangers, no matter how loving and dedicated, feed me and clean me.....I loathe the idea that my son, my grandchildren, my wife, my close relatives and friends, should remember me as a drooling ancient who does not even know who they are, on the few occasions when conscience forces them to come and see me.....a decent society should allow people to be in charge of their lives, and if they want to end them, they should be able to”*

**John Simpson, the BBC World Affairs Editor, in an interview reported on July 1, 2012**

*“The number of people over 90 rose by more than a quarter to 430,000 in the 10 years since the last census, a 26-fold increase in the past century. There are also now about 11,100 people who have past their 100th birthday - two-thirds more than a decade ago - starkly illustrating the effects of medical advances on the shape of modern Britain”*

**From a report on the 2011 census in The Daily Telegraph, July 17, 2012**

*“Women in England who turned 65 between 2008 and 2010 could on average expect another 11.8 years of healthy life expectancy. They will then experience nine years of poorer health, until death at 85.8 years. Their husbands of the same age are not doing much worse: for them, another 10.3 years of good quality life await, taking them to 75.3 years before dying at the average age of 83.2 years”*

**Office for National Statistics, August 29, 2012**

*“There’s no advantage to ageing. You don’t get wiser, you don’t get more mellow, you don’t see life in a more glowing way. You have to fight your body decaying, and you have less options”*

**Woody Allen, the film director, quoted in The Guardian on September 14, 2012**

*“The world needs to take urgent action to cope with the impact of a rapidly ageing population.....more than a billion people will be older than 60 in a decade.....In Britain, there are expected to be 500,000 centenarians by 2066”*

**Quotes from a United Nations report on “Ageing in the 21st Century”, issued on October 1, 2012**

*“Growing worries about the medicalised, miserable and costly way of death awaits many people in rich countries.....The prospect of the loss of autonomy, of dignity and of the ability to enjoy life are the main reasons cited by those wanting assisted suicide.....For those near the end of their natural lives, knowing that they can cease upon the midnight with no pain, is a great blessing”*

**The Economist, October 20, 2012.**

