

MDMD WEBSITE LAUNCHED

On October 9th MDMD formally launched its new website www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk. This was accompanied by a piece in the Sunday Times about our campaign. The website contains much new material, and will grow over time as we comment and link to stories in the news, and add articles discussing "Complex Issues".

One page of particular importance discusses the reasons why MDMD does not think the approach of restricting assisted dying to those who are diagnosed with a life expectancy of 6 months or less is sufficient. <https://www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk/info/issues/6-month-safeguard/>

Another important area is our consideration of how to protect "vulnerable people". This is one of the major concerns of those opposed to changing the current law on assisted dying. In an attempt to move the right-to-die debate forward, we discuss what is meant by "vulnerable people" and what they may be vulnerable to. We go on to suggest an idea for providing better protection for these people through what we refer to as "Extended Advance Decisions" (EADs). This provides a formal means for someone to record their wish for the **option** of an assisted death should they deem it necessary at a future time. To be valid the EAD would need to be made at a time when the person was not "vulnerable". Our suggestion is that a future law might protect people considered "vulnerable" by refusing their requests for an assisted death unless they could demonstrate their long standing wish for this option through an EAD made when they were not considered vulnerable. This would overcome any suspicion that they had been persuaded or pressured into requesting an assisted death.

<https://www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk/info/issues/protecting-vulnerable-people/>

<https://www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk/info/issues/extended-ad/>

The publicity surrounding our new website has generated a significant influx of new members – we warmly welcome these new supporters. One comment from a new supporter is particularly poignant: "Finally, an organisation that can suggest action outside the unrealistic boundaries of terminal conditions and 12 month or less expectations."

MDMD/FATE MEETING AND MDMD AGM OCT 28TH

Prof. Celia Kitzinger gave a stimulating lecture on Advance Decisions (AD) and how to keep them up to date. She explained why everyone should write an AD and covered many aspects of how to write one effectively. She discussed why ADs may need to be updated at various points in life, contrasting what a healthy person in their 20's might say, with someone later in life who has known medical conditions. Her slides, the audio recording, and a description of her talk is in the *Lectures* section of the MDMD website under *Information*.

<https://www.mydeath-mydecision.org.uk/info/lectures/2016-annual-lecture/>

Have you written your AD and shared it with your GP and next of kin? If not, now is a great time to do so. If you have, do encourage friends and relatives to do likewise.

EUTHANASIA 2016 CONFERENCE IN AMSTERDAM

The biennial conference of the World Federation of Right To Die societies took place in Amsterdam in May. Phil Cheatle (MDMD Coordinator) presented a paper titled "*When is a Life Complete?*" Colin Brewer (MDMD Associate Coordinator) presented a poster titled "*Family Members' Responses to Being Present at an Assisted suicide: A British Follow-up Study.*" Both papers were well received and led to many useful contacts.

OTHER PUBLICITY FOR MDMD

The U3A magazine *Third Age Matters* published a full page article about those who feel their life is complete, and arguing for a change in the law, written by Phil Cheatle and Michael Irwin (MDMD Founder and Patron). This was balanced by another full page article opposing any change in the law. Letters published in the following two issues showed strong support for our article.

PROGRESS IN CANADA AND CALIFORNIA

In June over 35 million Canadians and 39 million Californians were granted the right to an assisted death option. The conditions are more limited than MDMD would like in both cases – but these are important steps in the right direction. Canada in particular is interesting – the first Commonwealth country to pass an assisted dying law – and one which does not have a fixed time limit on life expectancy, but uses the more flexible wording of "reasonably foreseeable" death.

These developments increase the number of people worldwide who now have a legal assisted dying option from 48m to 122m, an increase of over 150%.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

A number of people have been asking how they can help MDMD in its campaign. The organisation is run entirely by volunteers and funded by donations. There are many ways in which our supporters can help the campaign:

- Talking to friends, and relatives about the issues, your views and MDMD. In particular, spreading the word about the usefulness of Advanced Decisions.
- Writing letters to local papers or relevant magazines.
- Joining or forming a local MDMD die-a-logue group of like-minded people. There are currently groups in Brighton and Hove, Bristol, Cambridge, and London (North and South). Possible new groups are under discussion in West Midlands, Devon, Norwich.
- Financially – please consider leaving a legacy to MDMD in your will.
- Donations – some supporters give considerably more than the £15 per person annual donation we request each January. We are very grateful for a continuing stream of these donations that give us financial stability and can increase our options.
- If you would like to get more involved in active campaigning please let us know so that we can alert you to opportunities. We are particularly keen to hear from those with legal, medical or campaigning experience, and anyone who has accompanied someone to Switzerland.

KEEPING US IN THE NEWS – DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

In talking to journalists, we are frequently asked for real-life stories. These are incredibly valuable in drawing attention to the general issues. If you are prepared to share your story, or one concerning a relative or friend, please tell us. Perhaps you feel your life is complete and are at the early stages of considering an assisted death abroad – or you know someone who was denied the "good" assisted death they wished for. A continual stream of real-life stories, highlighting the problems with the current law, is essential for our campaign to keep the issues in the public eye. Stories that highlight the unfairness of limiting assisted dying only to those who have a prognosis of 6 months or less are of particular interest.

NEXT LONDON MEETING AND AGM

The next FATE/MDMD meeting will be held on **Saturday 6th May 2017** 2pm at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, WC1. Els van Wijngaarden will give the 2017 MDMD Annual Lecture, titled "*Ready to give up on life: the lived experience of older people who consider their lives to be completed and no longer worth living*". Els has been conducting research in this area at the University of Humanistic Studies in Utrecht for her PhD and has recently published results in the BMJ. Her work has received much recent attention in the Netherlands as this issue is being considered by their government.

This will be followed by the MDMD 2017 AGM. (We are moving the AGM to our Spring meeting to coincide better with the start of our financial year.)

We are very pleased that Dr. Erika Preisig has agreed to talk to us at our Autumn 2017 meeting. Date still to be arranged. Erika is a family doctor and Vice President of Lifecircle in Basle. She is the Swiss doctor who helped Simon Binner in the BBC2 documentary "*How to Die: Simon's Choice*", shown in February 2016.

QUOTES

"Only with a legal Euthanasia Bill on the statute books will the many people who find themselves in the same situation as me be able to slip away peacefully in their sleep instead of dreading the night."

Lord Rix, former actor, cross bench peer and President of Mencap, in a letter to the Speaker of the House of Lords. He opposed assisted dying legislation in the House of Lords, but changed his mind when he personally experienced an unacceptable end-of-life.

"In refusing dying people the right to die with dignity, we fail to demonstrate the compassion that lies at the heart of Christian values."

Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Washington Post

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