

Newsletter #67

September 2006

Special Edition: World Federation of Right to Die Society conference in Toronto - an overview

By: Alex Schadenberg

This article is a shortened version of the full-report that will be available next month. The full-report will include analysis of the comments made by speakers and participants.

The World Federation of Right to Die Societies 16th Biennial Conference was held September 7 - 10; in Toronto.

I attended the three day conference to observe, take notes and to learn the thoughts and strategies of the euthanasia/ assisted suicide movement. I have always thought that it is important to understand the strategies of the opposition in order have an effective strategy of our own.

The conference was split into 3 sections. There was a pre-conference session on Thursday, Sept 7; organized by Compassion & Choices, an American group from Oregon.

The main conference was on Sept 8 & 9, hosted by Dying With Dignity, Canada's largest advocacy and educational group for the legalization of assisted suicide.

The third section of the conference was the **NuTech** meeting on Sunday, Sept 10. NuTech is an international organization that exists to develop suicide techniques.

"The March of the Religious Right"

"The March of the Religious Right - Where Does it Lead?" was the first major talk on the Thursday. It featured **Robert Rabin**, former Assistant U.S. Attorney General, Office of Legislative Affairs, a very impressive speaker, and **Jon Eisenberg**, an attorney and author of the book; "Using Terri" who seemed to be a radical ideologue.

Robert Rabin is a political organizer and advisor who offered insight into the strategy of the Right to Die movement. He explained how the Right to Die movement was attempting to convince politicians that their position was politically positive.

Rabin is convinced that their message must be: **"Who Decides?"**. He is convinced that the *Who Decides* theme will resonate with enough people to bring them victory.

Rabin also believes that referendum campaigns are unwise because the Right to Die movement lacks the financial resources to win.

Eisenberg thought that they needed to identify religious leaders who supported euthanasia. He told us that **Fr. Kevin O'Rourke** provided him with the arguments that he used to defend the Schiavo case. Fr. O'Rourke was used as an example of a Catholic priest who is on their side.

Eisenberg found **Wesley Smith** to be a interesting guy who he thought was the most effective opposition. Wesley Smith has identified several comments concerning himself and his wife, in Eisenberg's book, that are outright lies.

Compassion & Choices - Client Support Program.

Helen Beum facilitated the next session concerning the *Compassion & Choices - Client Support Program*. Helen led the session with 4 volunteers providing accounts of their experiences in the client support program.

The *Client Support Program* has 130 volunteers spanning 27 states in the US. They received 2500 calls last year.

Many people believe that the *Client Support Program* only offers information to people who are seeking "choices" at the end of life. The reality is that the *Compassion & Choices - Client Support Program* is an assisted suicide program that trains volunteers to journey with and at times assist their clients to commit suicide.

Sam Fogal, a volunteer explained how he was passionate about hastening death. He was a minister for 40 years and witnessed many people suffer while dying. He had been involved with his first hastened death a few weeks previous and felt that it was the "right thing to do".

Carol (Van Alstyne?), the co-ordinator of the *Client Support Program* in California and a retired palliative care nurse, said volunteers should not appear to be pushy. Volunteers often feel that "no news" means "no big event."

Carol stated that they have had peaceful, successful hastened deaths, but after having the ability to choose assisted suicide, they feel better even if they don't use it.

Judy Schneiderman, a volunteer from Cincinnati, said that she retired from a career in medical sales and believes that the cost for medical technology is often a waste of money. She became a volunteer because she wants to hasten her own death and thought that her involvement was a safety net in case her suffering was unbearable.

Dr. Tom Preston has a long history of advocating for assisted suicide. He is not only a *Client Support Program* volunteer but acts as a medical consultant. He was at the first hastened death for *Compassionate Dying* a forerunner to *Compassion & Choices*. Dr. Preston stated that after several hastened deaths he has come to understand the value of a planned death. He thought the hardest death is a sudden death, while a planned death provides the opportunity to say goodbye to loved ones.

The session was wrapped up by explaining that every volunteer under-takes a three day training seminar and they must be part of the team meetings.

Toward an Iron Clad Plan for Dementia

Dr. Stanley Terman is concerned that there is a growing number of Americans who are needing care due to dementia or Alzheimer's. He believes that the cost of this care is simply going to become excessive.

Terman is concerned that family members will refuse to allow patients die by dehydration since many people do not have a Power of Attorney document that will insure that they will be dehydrated to death when in a state of dementia. To solve this problem Terman has written the book: "*The Best Way to Say Goodbye*" that explains how to ensure that you will be dehydrated to death, if experiencing dementia.

Terman also started a group called *Caring Advocates*. This organization is developing "*Trusting Circles*" comprised of people who will act as a power of attorney. He stated that if you wish insure that you will have food and fluids withdrawn then you need to read his book. If you wish to prevent the withdrawal or withholding of food and fluids then you need to read **Wesley Smith's** books.

Unifying Messages in a Polarized World.

Steve Hopcraft was the political organizer for the recent California campaign to legalize assisted suicide.

Hopcraft explained the results of the polling data from the California campaign. He is convinced that even though they

failed to get the bill passed into law, that in fact they were so successful it is inevitable that they will pass a law.

The California campaign had hired David Binder to do focus groups to learn how to frame the questions for the general public. They found that they must ban the word suicide and assisted suicide which have negative connotations. When they used terms such as **Aid in Dying** or **End of Life Choices** they gained 15% in their polling.

They unsuccessfully attempted to get the media to change their language. They are now attempting to change the language before their next attempt to change the law. They will frame the next debate on the themes of Patients Rights, Senior Citizens Issues, and the Right to Choose.

Hopcraft was emphatic that they needed to convince politicians that they won't get thrown out of office for supporting assisted suicide. He also felt that they wouldn't get thrown out of office for opposing assisted suicide.

He concluded by stating that nothing trumps individual stories. People always respond to personal stories.

George Felos - Terri Schiavo

Friday morning opened with George Felos, the lawyer for Michael Schiavo, who defended the killing of Terri Schiavo.

Felos stated that: "spiritual leaders are simply ideologues who manipulate truth for a purpose." He said that the Schiavo case was high-jacked by the pro-life and religious right as part of their war for the Right to Life. He said: the Schindlers had a moving message, they thought their daughter may get better, but the religious right used them.

Felos also stated that Gov Jeb Bush of Florida, the pro-life and the "religious right" saw Terri's case as an opportunity to overturn Roe vs Wade.

Felos commented on **Wesley Smith's** book *Forced Exit* in relation to his comments concerning Terri's medical condition. He claimed that there was no proof for Smith's position and that Terri was in a vegetative state. He also attacked Wesley Smith for co-authoring the current Nebraska amendment that if passes by plebiscite would make it nearly impossible to dehydrate a person in a vegetative state. He was concerned that they might lose the battle in Nebraska.

Felos concluded by stating that more money is spent on someone in the last 6 months of their life. When is enough, enough? He said: "If I can't recognize that the morning, then I don't want a feeding tube and I don't want antibiotics."

Felos responded to a question concerning Canada stating that: he thought Canada was a far more progressive nation than the United States and that it is possible that **Canada could become a safe-haven for the Right to Die.**”

Dr. Rob Jonquière, the leader of the right to die movement in the Netherlands stated that Terri Schiavo could not have been dehydrated to death in the Netherlands because she didn't have an advanced directive.

Felos responded: “You are doomed to failure when you believe you are right. ...I try to caution myself from saying I am right but rather to listen what people are saying.”

Life and Death Decisions, Who Decides?

Roland Halpern is the director of community relations for Compassion & Choices and unsuccessfully lobbied to get the Hawaii Death with Dignity Act passed in 2002.

Halpern emphasized the need for a change in language. The terms assisted suicide and hastened death are negative whereas Aid in Dying and End of Life Choices are positive. Halpern broke down polling data to show us that the more people are educated, the more likely they are to support assisted suicide.

He suggested that people need to use the method of *deliberation* that has been developed by the **National Issues Forums** (<http://www.nifi.org>) to effectively educate and break down barriers to assisted suicide. Deliberation is a style of reasoning, by talking through difficult decisions. Deliberation uses collaboration to find the common ground and possible agreement. The purpose of deliberation is to change how people view the question.

The advantage to using the *National Issues Forums* program on *Life and Death Decisions* is that it creates credibility and opens the door to schools, community groups, seniors groups and Churches in their target demographic. The *Life and Death Decisions* program establishes three positions concerning death and dying. It explains the strengths and weaknesses of each position. The moderator then works through the questions to find common ground.

Since the first position, which is claimed to be the Sanctity of Life position, is a vitalist position, therefore the program moves people away from a Sanctity of Life position.

The end result is that people who oppose assisted suicide remain opposed, those who support assisted suicide continue to support it, but the middle ground, representing the majority of people, move toward a view of supporting assisted suicide.

Lord Joel Joffe,

Joffe doesn't like the term euthanasia because it has terrible connotations including hastening the deaths of the mentally ill people and eugenics. He prefers the term assisted dying. His first bill in the British House of Lords was presented in 2003. His second bill in 2005 was based on an Oregon model.

Joffe was upset with the response to his bill from the Churches. The Archbishop of Cardiff sent out 500,000 DVD's. He felt that his bill successfully united the Churches.

Deborah Annetts, the executive director of *Dying in Dignity* in the UK explained their campaign to support the Joffe bill.

She said that first they received training from Compassion & Choices in Oregon. Their first goal was to build their support base. They built a database of 100,000 people, 10,000 email contacts, 300 terminally ill campaigners, and 50 media columnists who published articles throughout the UK.

Dying in Dignity worked hard to convince the British Medical Association to take a neutral position on the issues. This was achieved in 2005, but reversed in 2006.

Annetts claimed that their opposition adopted American style tactics by hiring professional media and by working with **Wesley Smith**.

Annetts was particularly anti-Christian. She stated that the “Bishops are like the Taliban.” and she said that: “we will never have the same money so we need to use our brains.”

Annetts believes that since many people are going to Switzerland for suicide (suicide tourism) that eventually these people will demand a change in the UK law.

She concluded her talk by stating that they are creating cultural change through the media. There are two Soap Opera's that are currently featuring stories on assisted suicide. Both stories were written with the help of Dying in Dignity.

The next presentation was a speech written by **Evelyn Martens** and read by her friend Brenda Hearn. This talk will only be analyzed in the full-report available next month.

Nudging the Law

Robert Rivas, a lawyer in Florida who attempted to legalize assisted suicide in Florida through the courts, believed that assisted suicide will only be legalized through plebiscites.

He thought that their movement needed to: preserve their gains, change the minds of people at the grassroots, and support initiative (plebiscite) drives.

Dr. Richard MacDonald is a past president of the World Federation of Right to Die Societies (2000 - 2002) and the past medical director for the Hemlock Society.

He said that he is getting tired of nudging the law and thinks it is time to “kick the law in the ____” He said that there have been no major successes since Oregon.

He said that very few people use the law in Oregon, the Netherlands or Belgium and he felt that major gains would not be won for at least 50 years. He said that more people commit tragic suicide in Oregon than use the assisted suicide law.

He hoped that maybe Canada might move ahead and become a safe-haven for euthanasia and assisted suicide. He thought the law would change by people breaking the law.

Jocelyn Downie is a professor of law and medicine at Dalhousie University in Halifax. She believes that the law will eventually change but in the meantime they could change the guidelines that prosecutors follow in Canada. If prosecutors are convinced not to lay charges then the law becomes ineffective.

She also urged the use of **Jury Nullification**. In Canada, if a jury refuses to convict because they think the law is wrong then the person is not guilty. This works even when the evidence for conviction is overwhelming.

She also believes that the law can be challenged in the courts based on the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. She said that it has been more than 10 years since the Rodriguez case and only one Supreme Court justice remains since that time.

She suggested that they: • draft charging guidelines for prosecutors, • draft arguments that the courts will agree with, • draft an education campaign, • draft legislation.

Lesley Martin is an activist from New Zealand who killed her ailing mother by smothering her with a pillow. Martin is an optimist and believes that by intentionally breaking the law and using the media and the arts, they will change the law.

Dr. Michael Irwin is the former UN medical director for UNICEF and a past chairman of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society in the UK.

He actively encourages people in the UK to travel to Switzerland for assisted suicide. At least 50 people from the UK have traveled to Dignitas apartment in Switzerland. These activities help change public opinion because eventually people will demand for assisted suicide to be legal in the UK.

The New Censorship

Dr. Philip Nitschke from Australia, the peaceful pill activist, debated **Dr. Rodney Syme** from Australia concerning the law in Australia that outlaws internet sites that promote suicide.

Nitschke explained that the law outlawing suicide promotion and counselling was not only censorship but specifically designed to stop him. Nitschke had operated an internet site and email suicide counselling for several years. He also pointed out that on March 27, 2006; a bill was proposed in the German legislature that was similar to the Australian law.

Nitschke warned that laws banning internet and email suicide promotion are a major set-back for Right to Die groups.

Dr. Rodney Syme believes that the Australian law goes too far but some restrictions on suicide information is necessary. He believes that it is irresponsible to promote suicide and provide instructions for suicide on the internet or by email.

How Aid in Dying Strengthens Hospice/Palliative Care

Ann Jackson, a director of the Oregon Hospice Association explained how the Oregon Death with Dignity Act has worked well with palliative care.

A tell-tale sign of her presentation was when she stated that she uses the term assisted suicide and not aid in dying to appear neutral on the issue. Jackson was clearly not neutral on the issue but rather is an advocate for assisted suicide.

Arthur Schaefer, the director of the Centre for Professional and Applied Ethics in Winnipeg stated that he thought that hospice/palliative care and assisted suicide belong together. He thought that assisted suicide and allowing and withdrawing treatment at the end of life are ethically the same.

Even though Schaefer believes that the slippery slope is a false argument he stated that the provisions in the Oregon law were inadequate and needed to be widened for greater use.

The final session was a debate between **Derek Humphrey**, formerly of the Hemlock Society and **Dr. Rob Jonquière**, the leader of the Right to Die Society in the Netherlands. This session will receive a full evaluation in the full-report that will be available next month.

There were other sessions, including the NuTech meeting, that were not evaluated by this overview but will be evaluated in the full-report that is available next month. The full-report will be written for anyone who wishes to know the views of the other-side, but also to develop a co-ordinated strategy with the leaders of groups opposing the legalization of euthanasia and assisted suicide.

'Bioethicist': OK to kill babies after they're born

WorldNetDaily.com, September 14, 2006

An internationally known Princeton "bioethicist" and animal-rights activist says he'd kill disabled babies if it were in the "best interests" of the family, because he sees no distinction in the child's life whether it is born or not, and the world already allows abortion.

The comments come from **Peter Singer**, a controversial bioethics professor, who responded to a series of questions in the UK Independent this week.

Earlier, WND reported Singer believes the next few decades will see a massive upheaval in the concept of life and rights, with only "a rump of hard-core, know-nothing religious fundamentalists" still protecting life as sacrosanct.

To the rest, it will be a commodity to be re-evaluated regularly for its worth.

His newest sermon on his beliefs came in a question-and-answer interview the Independent set up with readers.

Singer's response came to Dublin reader Karen Meade's question: "Would you kill a disabled baby?"

"Yes, if that was in the best interests of the baby and of the family as a whole. Many people find this shocking, yet they support a woman's right to have an abortion," he said.

He added that one point on which he agrees with the pro-life movement is that, "from the point of view of ethics rather than the law, there is no sharp distinction between the foetus and the newborn baby."

The statement furthers the arguments that Singer's position is just an extension of the culture of death that has developed in the world, with euthanasia legal in some locations, abortion legal in many and even charges that in some repressive societies there's an active business in harvesting healthy organs from victims in order to provide transplants for the wealthy.

"At least he's consistent," **Alex Schadenberg**, executive director of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition, told LifeSiteNews.com.

Singer holds that man is no different from other forms of life, and therefore man's life is not worth more than, for example, a cow.

He told readers he'd kill 10 cows before killing one human, but that's not because they are of less value, only that humans would mourn.

"I've written that it is much worse to kill a being who is aware of having a past and a future, and who plans for the future. Normal humans have such plans, but I don't think cows do," he said.

However, he did qualify his description with the word, "normal."

"Once again Singer is making distinctions between human beings he would consider normal and those he would consider not normal, thus he is deciding who is a person and who is not," **Schadenberg** told LifeSiteNews.

"Non-persons are allowed to be killed," under Singer's ideology, he said.

Singer also said the focus on infanticide was not his, but those who oppose him and the media.

"It's always been a minor aspect of my work," he said.

In WND's earlier report, Singer said that the court-ordered circumstances that killed Terri Schiavo, a disabled Florida woman, in 2005 may be the turning point at which holding the position of the sanctity of life became "untenable."

She died after a court ordered, upon her husband's request, that water and food be withheld from her.

Continued from Front Page:

Singer's support for legalized euthanasia and his endorsement of killing the disabled for up to 28 days

after birth also sparked protests against his hiring in 1999 by Princeton, a university founded by the Presbyterian denomination.

Montana doctor sentenced to 6 years for euthanasia.

By: Alex Schadenberg, Euthanasia Prevention Coalition

Dr. James Bischoff of Ennis Montana has been sentenced to 6 years in prison after pleading guilty to negligent homicide and fraudulently obtaining drugs in the euthanasia death of Kathryn Dvarishkis, who was 85 years old.

Dr. Bischoff was very upset with the 6 year sentence saying that he would not have pleaded guilty if he knew that his plea bargain which included a 2 year sentence was not to be honoured.

Dr Bischoff euthanized Kathryn Dvarishkis on July 16, 2000. At the time he claimed that he only used enough drug to ease her pain.

Sandy Dvarishkis, the daughter of Kathryn, stated that Bischoff had given her mother an injection which failed to cause her death, only to return with another injection which resulted in her death. The daughter also claimed that Bischoff spoke several times with her mother about euthanasia and that he was the one to open the topic.

Bischoff was also convicted of fraudulently obtaining drugs. He had obtained 48,000 doses of narcotics from a wholesale drug distributor over a one year period without proper documentation.

Bischoff originally claimed that he didn't realize that euthanasia was illegal in the United States when he killed Kathryn Dvarishkis.

Murder-suicide in Penticton

By Alex Schadenberg, Euthanasia Prevention Coalition
Globe and Mail (letters) August 31, 2006

On, August 29, an elderly man shot his wife who was diagnosed with the early stages of Alzheimer's disease.

Media reports have indicated that the act of murder-suicide was possibly a loving act by a husband who did not want his wife to suffer.

The Euthanasia Prevention Coalition expresses sympathy to the family and ask the media to simply report the facts.

The reality is that homicide-suicide deaths are rarely "Mercy" Killings.

A study published in the March 2005 issue of the American Journal of Geriatric Psychiatry (13:211-217) by Julie E. Malphurs & Donna Cohen) titled: "A Statewide case-control study of spousal homicide-suicide in older persons" found that most homicide-suicides of older persons are not "mercy" killings.

The study concluded: "In fact, this "mercy-killing" perception is a myth. The husbands in such cases are often abusers, and the wives are rarely complicit. In many such cases, defense wounds indicate that the wife fought for her life."

The study indicated that society needs to not only be concerned with the care of the ailing spouse, but also with the health and mental state of the healthy spouse. Many spouses suffer depression and mental breakdown due to the demands of the care and changes related to an ailing spouse.

Malphurs and Cohen indicated that many of these terrible incidents could be avoided by providing good care to both the ailing spouse and the otherwise healthy spouse.