

Newsletter #68

October 2006

Palliative Care programs cut in Federal Budget

Recently the federal government announced that they have found 1 Billion dollars in savings for the next fiscal year.

Many of the government cuts were in areas that most Canadians might support but one area of funding that was cut was a serious error.

Last year the Secretariat on Palliative and End-of-Life Care received 1.7 million from Health Canada for: research, professional training, volunteer training, best practices and quality care, and public information and awareness.

Due to the budget cuts, Health Canada has allocated \$470,000 in funding to the Secretariat on Palliative and End-of-life care with \$300,000 in pending funding.

This is a serious blow to Palliative Care across Canada. Palliative Care requires a comprehensive commitment from all levels of government not a cut to its programming.

Please write to the Hon Tony Clement, Minister of Health, and state:

Palliative and end-of-life care in Canada requires a comprehensive long-term strategy and sustainable funding.

My concern is that many Canadians are not receiving necessary care at the end-of-life making them vulnerable to the suggestion of euthanasia and assisted suicide.

I believe that improving availability and training in palliative care in Canada will result in less demand for euthanasia and assisted suicide in Canada.

Send your letter to:

The Hon Tony Clement, Minister of Health
Minister's Office - Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building, Tunney's Pasture
Postal Locator 0906C
Ottawa ON K1A 0K9
Email: Minister_Ministre@hc-sc.gc.ca
Fax: 613-952-1154

Story of Hope, Faith: Young Boy Wakes from Coma

KOIN News 6 - Yamhill Oregon

A Yamhill boy has awakened from a 22-month coma.

Two years ago, **Devon Rivers** was rushed to the emergency room. He was diagnosed with rheumatic fever and he slipped into a coma.



Carla Rivers said experts told her that her son was in a persistent vegetative state and would likely never recover. But in August, Rivers came out of his coma.

We can't even imagine how differently this story would have turned out had we given up. That's not saying we didn't have low days. We had low days, we had depressed days," Carla Rivers told KOIN News 6.

While Rivers, now 11, isn't talking yet, his parents believe that he will learn again. He continues to live in Gresham Oregon care home.

Doctors are still trying to find an explanation, but Carla Rivers believes that it's a miracle.

Presentation to Members of Parliament

Bobby Schindler, the brother of Terri Schiavo, and Dr. Margaret Cottle, (palliative care physician) will be speaking on behalf of the Euthanasia Prevention Coalition and the Institute of Marriage and Family to Members of Parliament in Ottawa on October 26, 2006.

Bobby and his family are now operating the Terri Schindler Schiavo foundation which is dedicated to the rights people with disabilities, the frail elderly and vulnerable people against care rationing, euthanasia, assisted suicide and medical killing. It is very expensive to have experts speak to Members of Parliament in Ottawa. **Please donate toward defraying the costs of this event.**

Texas nurse sentenced to life after pleading no contest to killing 10 patients with drugs

By: Angela K. Brown - Associated Press October 5, 2006

A former nurse was sentenced Thursday to life in prison on charges that she killed 10 hospital patients with drug injections because she found them too demanding.

Vickie Dawn Jackson, 40, pleaded no contest on Wednesday and was sentenced after prosecutors presented their evidence to a judge.

Investigators believe Jackson injected the patients through their intravenous lines with a drug normally used to temporarily stop breathing when doctors insert a breathing tube.

FBI agent David Burns testified that the patients had been hospitalized for minor ailments – including a foot sore, diarrhea or dementia – and were about to be released.

“In general, they were the kind of patients who needed more care,” Burns said at the sentencing. “I think that’s probably why. They’re verbose. They want this. They’re thirsty. It seemed to make her angry.”

Authorities became suspicious after nearly two dozen deaths were reported at Nocona General Hospital in late 2000 and early 2001, a stretch of time when the hospital should have seen only five to 10 deaths.

Authorities discovered at least 20 vials of the drug were missing. And officers searching garbage at Jackson’s home found a syringe that contained traces of it, Burns said.

Jackson’s attorney, Bruce Martin, said Jackson maintained her innocence and pleaded no contest to avoid a trial so her daughter would not be called to testify.

In a statement issued through her attorney, Jackson said she was “sympathetic to the families of the deceased” and “acutely aware that closure for them is necessary, if, indeed, closure can ever come for them.”

John Fitch, whose grandmother Dorothy Vanderburg was 79 when she died, said Jackson had taken “the easy way out.”

“I wonder if this is your twisted way of thumbing your nose at those of us you have hurt,” Fitch said in court. “May (God) have mercy on your soul.”

Prosecutors did not seek the death penalty, meaning Jackson would have been sentenced to life in prison if convicted by a jury.

The case was moved from Nocona, 90 miles northwest of Dallas, to this West Texas town because of publicity surrounding the deaths.

Swiss clinic wants to offer assisted suicide to the mentally ill

By: Ben Russell and Maxine Frith

The UK Independent - September 21, 2006

People who suffer from depression or mental illness could be allowed to legally end their lives at a Swiss suicide clinic, if campaigners win a legal test case next month.



Ludwig Minelli

Ludwig Minelli, who runs the Dignitas clinic in Zurich, wants to extend his assisted suicide service to patients who are not terminally ill. The Swiss Supreme Court is to hear the case in October of a patient with bipolar disorder who wants the right to die at the clinic.

Mr Minelli told a fringe meeting of the Liberal Democrat conference in Brighton that he wanted all people, including the mentally ill or depressed, to be given the “marvellous opportunity” to end their lives if they wanted.

Pro- and anti-euthanasia groups in Britain reacted with horror. Dr Peter Saunders, campaign director of the Care Not Killing Alliance, a lobby group opposed to assisted suicide and euthanasia, said: “Dr Minelli’s spine-chilling comments only highlight the dangers that would arise in Britain if we followed Switzerland’s example and legalised assisted suicide.

“We would soon have our own Dr Minellis, encouraging sick and vulnerable people to end their own lives, if only to avoid becoming a burden on their families or the NHS. Assisted dying is a slippery slope to all the horrors of legalised killing and must be resisted at all costs.”

Deborah Annetts, the chief executive of the pro-euthanasia group Dignity in Dying, said: “Any law in the UK must be based on choice for competent adults who are terminally ill. This is a fundamental safeguard. We are totally opposed to allowing people with chronic depression have help to die.”

Switzerland outlaws euthanasia but is tolerant on assisted suicide, in which doctors give patients the drugs to assist them with suicide. The policy has led to a wave of so-called “suicide tourism” to Switzerland. So far, 54 Britons have travelled to the Dignitas clinic to die, including four in the past six weeks.

Some relatives of those who have died at the clinic have been questioned by British police about aiding a suicide, although no one has been charged.

Mr Minelli told the meeting that people who were depressed or had mental health problems were often left without appropriate options and that his clinic offered counselling and care before allowing assisted suicide. He said: "We should say in principle that suicide is a marvellous possibility to human beings because they have cause to withdraw themselves from situations where it is unbearable for them."

He added: "These people do live in a sort of tunnel. They have just two exits which are both horrific. Either to go on until the so-called natural death with the pain and all the difficulty, or you try to make a lonely suicide which has this heavy risk. If we open up an emergency exit, the despair in the tunnel goes away and we have new opportunities."

Liberal Democrat policy is to support assisted suicide for the terminally ill. But Chris Davies, the Liberal Democrat MEP who called the meeting, said he did not support assisted suicide for people who were not terminally ill.

A Bill to allow assisted suicide for the terminally ill, promoted by Lord Joffe, was blocked in the House of Lords this year.

Invalid Starved in tragic mix-up at hospital

Irish Independent - Oct 11, 2006

Cerebral Palsy Patient 'not fed for days'

A Breakdown in communication at a Dublin hospital led to a woman who was suffering with cerebral palsy not being fed for three days, an inquest has heard.

Michelle Tallon (38), Kilcock, Co Kildare, died at James Connolly Memorial Hospital of acute respiratory distress syndrome (ARDS) on July 23 last year, 2½ weeks after she was admitted.

A jury at the inquest returned a verdict of death by medical misadventure and recommended that the hospital set up a team to deal specifically with patients with special needs.

They also recommended that the hospital improve their communications protocol.

Investigation

An internal investigation following Ms Tallon's death revealed a number of systems failures at the hospital, coroner Dr Kieran Geraghty told the court.

The inquest heard that Ms Tallon, who was unable to speak or feed herself, was initially admitted complaining of constipation and vomiting. Her parents were unable to get her to eat and she had trouble keeping anything down.

Doctors initially believed she was suffering from a gastrointestinal infection and she was found to have a blocked and swollen bowel, which the hospital tried to relieve through use of enemas and laxatives through naso-gastric tubes.

Initial instructions by doctors were that Ms Tallon should not be fed.

However, four days after admittance, medical staff decided that she could begin to take solids again but failed to remove an NPO (nil per oral) order from her bedside, which indicated to nursing staff that the patient was not to be fed. Dr Edward Keelan said the instructions of the medical team were that Ms Tallon was to begin eating solids on July 11, but "some confusion" led to this not getting through to the nursing team until July 13.

Ms Tallon died after a transfer to intensive care.

Bernard Tallon told the inquest that the family constantly tried to raise the issue of his daughter's lack of feeding but it was difficult to get a doctor involved in his daughter's care to meet with him.

As a result, he made a formal complaint against the hospital shortly before his daughter's death.

He said he was deeply shocked by a phone call from a senior doctor involved in his daughter's care telling him to come to the hospital immediately "to spend some quality time with your daughter because I'm turning off the life-support machine in 48 hours".

Mr Tallon added: "I later held her in my arms and she passed away."

Louisiana Nursing Home Owners Face Cruelty, Homicide Charges

Associated Press - September 21, 2006

The owners of a nursing home where 35 patients died after Hurricane Katrina were indicted on charges of negligent homicide and cruelty to the infirm.

A St. Bernard Parish grand jury took four hours to return the indictment on 35 counts of negligent homicide and 64 counts of cruelty to the infirm against Salvador and Mabel Mangano, who were arrested two weeks after the storm, which hit Aug 29, 2005. Their nursing home, St. Rita's, is near the rural St. Bernard community of Poydras.

Grave may be evidence of Nazi euthanasia of children with disabilities

The Associated Press - Menden Germany - October 6, 2006

The German authorities suspect that some of the remains found in a World War II era mass grave are from child victims of Adolf Hitler's euthanasia program, which killed people the Nazis considered worthless, officials said Friday.

Prosecutors acting on a tip from an aging witness have opened a murder investigation, despite the difficulty of finding conclusive evidence more than 60 years after the end of the war and the likelihood that most or all of those responsible are dead.

"As long as we have even the slightest indication that the children were victims of the Nazi euthanasia program, we will keep on investigating," a prosecutor, Ulrich Maass said.

Forensic experts have spent the past several days exhuming the remains from a Roman Catholic cemetery in Menden's Arnsberg district. The remains of 51 people have been discovered so far.

Twenty-two of the skeletons appeared to be children ranging from newborns to 7-year-olds. Some showed signs of physical or mental disabilities, such as those associated with Down syndrome, he said. Those signs and the young age of the deceased triggered the euthanasia suspicions.

Maass, a prosecutor at the Dortmund-based Central Office for Investigation of Nazi-era Crimes, said he had begun a criminal investigation for at least 22 counts of murder.

"Of course, there is the question of how we are to prove these crimes after all this time," Maass said. "If the children were poisoned, that will be practically impossible.

"Many patients were probably simply left to starve. In this case, it is impossible to prove who is guilty."

Others, including the 29 adults found in the grave, could have been killed in Allied bombing raids or in flooding after the British bombers known as the "dambusters" destroyed the dam in the Möhne Valley in 1943, he said.

The prosecutors hope that several witnesses, including an elderly woman who worked during the war in the nearby Wickede-Wimbern Hospital, where he suspects the children were killed, would be able to help his case.

"A hospital administrator and a doctor are also still alive," Maass said. It was not clear if the doctor had anything to do with the children, he said.

He declined to say who tipped off the authorities about the grave.

According to the initial results of the investigation, the bodies were buried in tow cemeteries in Menden between January 1944 and April 1945.

In the chaos of the final months of the war, Maass said, the hospital workers appeared to have given up regular burial in favour of hurriedly casting bodies into a mass grave.

About 200,000 people, many of them children, who were deemed unfit were killed by doctors under the Nazis as part of a vast Europe-wide euthanasia program, according to the US Holocaust Museum.

Karl Brandt, Hitler's personal physician, led the program.

He was convicted along with other Nazi doctors at the Nuremberg trials and executed.

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