Dying in the Age of Choice

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Past President, World Federation of RTD Societies
Founder & President, Hemlock Society of San Diego
The problem

- The end of life can be difficult
- Disability, pain, dependence, loss of personhood, loss of autonomy and dignity
- No more acceptable solutions

“"I’m not afraid of dying. I just don’t want to be there when it happens.”” Woody Allen
Solutions available now — each was controversial

- Advance Directives (LW/DPOA)
- POLST
- DNR orders
- Refusal/withdrawal of treatment
- Hospice
- Stopping eating and drinking
- Books, DVDs; Swiss organizations
- Medical aid in dying
GOAL: A GOOD DEATH, ENHANCING CONTROL, DIGNITY, CHOICE

- Medical Aid in Dying
- Do Not Resuscitate Orders
- Stopping Eating and Drinking
- Hospice Care
- Refusal of Treatment
- Durable Power of Attorney
- Living Will

Not a slippery slope
Physician aid in dying, or Death with Dignity

- Legal in 5 states (Oregon, Washington, Vermont, Montana, CA)— and Canada
- End of Life Options Law in California, will take effect June 9, 2016.
- Not “assisted suicide”
- Oregon now in its 19th year, no abuses
- Not Voluntary Euthanasia (direct injection by a doctor, legal in Holland, Belgium, Netherlands.)
DATA FROM OREGON

2015: 218 received prescriptions, used by 132 (61%)

Since 1997 (19 years), a total of 1,545 people have had prescriptions written under the DWDA; 991 patients have died from ingesting the medications. (64%)

From 1998 through 2013, prescriptions increased at an average of 12.1%; however, during 2014 and 2015, the number of prescriptions written increased by an average of 24.4%.

During 2015, the rate of DWDA deaths was 38.6 per 10,000 total deaths.) (.01%)
MORE STATS —

Among those 25 patients, median time from ingestion until death = 25 minutes

The three most frequently mentioned end-of-life concerns were: decreasing ability to participate in activities that made life enjoyable (96.2%), loss of autonomy (92.4%), and loss of dignity (75.4%).

More than 90% had hospice.

2015: 106 physicians wrote 218 prescriptions

No abuses reported in 19 years.

(see http://public.health.oregon.gov)
Who was Brittany Maynard?

Age 29

Terminal brain cancer

Lived in CA, went to OR to use DWD law

Died 11/1/14 with family present

Did not want hospice
How the new law works

- For mentally competent, California residents, with six months or less to live
- Two doctors confirm terminal diagnosis
- May require a psych evaluation
- 15 day waiting period: 3 requests
PROOF OF RESIDENCE

DRIVERS LICENSE OR OTHER CA ISSUED ID

CA VOTER REGISTRATION

EVIDENCE OF OWNING OR RENTING PROPERTY

FILING OF CA TAX RETURN IN MOST RECENT YEAR
Must make three requests: two orally and one in writing, witnessed in 15 days.

After 15 days doctor writes a prescription for a lethal drug.

Wait 2 days and find a cooperative pharmacist to fill it.

Once you have it you can use it — or not.

You must mix and swallow it.

Doesn't taste good.

You die peacefully, choosing the time and manner of your death.
BUT —

The medication has become expensive

Substitutes have been developed

None of them taste good

It may take a while to die, though unconsciousness occurs very quickly
More about the EOLO law

It is entirely voluntary for the patient, the doctor, the hospice, the pharmacist, and the health care system.

People and families needing help navigating the complexities of the law, in San Diego County, can get additional information:

The Hemlock Society of San Diego
619-233-4418
www.hemlocksocietysandiego.org
This law does NOT cover —

- Dementia, or those not mentally or physically capable
- Non-terminal illnesses
- People who can’t swallow
- Old age/tired of living
- See Final Exit Network for information and support in those categories:
  - [www.finalexitnetwork.org](http://www.finalexitnetwork.org)
Other resources

Suicide: Violent, impulsive, uncertain means not recommended, but legal; Assisting, illegal

Books (Final Exit) and DVDs available for reliable and dignified methods (FinalExit.org)

Medications — not available

Final Exit Network

Switzerland, expensive, complex; 3 organizations
This is a world-wide movement
“I want to do it on my own terms. I want to choose the place and time. I want my friends to be there. And I don’t want to linger and dwindle and rot in front of myself. I want to go out with some dignity.”

A young woman who used the law in OR
The Rt. Rev Shelby Spong, Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Newark to the US Congress

Assisted dying should never be a requirement, but it should always be a legal and moral option. The decision to end one’s life needs to be faced openly, honestly, freely and in consultation with our loved ones, our doctors, and our spiritual advisors. When the decision on assisted dying is made this way, I am convinced that it is a life-affirming moral choice. I come to these conclusions as a Christian... I see the holiness of life enhanced, not diminished, by letting people have a say in how they choose to die.

Many of us want the moral and legal right to choose to die with our faculties intact, surrounded by those we love before we are reduced to breathing cadavers, with no human dignity attached to our final days... Life must not be identified with the extension of biological existence.
What YOU can do—

Talk to loved ones about your wishes

Talk to your doctor about his/her willingness to provide assistance in dying, or to give 2nd opinion

Join and support a Right to Die organization

Contact the Hemlock Society of San Diego for information about using the law
The Hemlock Society of San Diego (501C3) has free, monthly, public meetings on the 3rd Sunday at 1:30

Even months: RTD Film Series, Mission Valley Library

Odd months: Lecture, panel on EOL issues, Scottish Rite Center

www.hemlocksocietysandiego.org
619-233-4418
Hemlock Society of San Diego invites you to a free film showing of

HOW TO DIE IN OREGON

Filmmaker Peter Richardson enters the lives of the terminally ill as they consider whether—and when—to end their lives by lethal overdose. At the heart of the film -- Winner, Grand Jury Prize, Sundance Film Festival -- are the patients themselves, their families and friends, as they grapple with the legal option they are allowed in Oregon — and now in California. Both sides of this complex, emotionally charged issue are explored to emerge into a life-affirming, powerful portrait of what it means to die with dignity.

Sunday, February 21, 2016
1:30 - 4 PM
Mission Valley Library
2123 Fenton Parkway
Next to IKEA. Directions for public transport on our website

For more information call (619) 233-4418 or visit HemlockSocietySanDiego.org
Thanks for listening. What’s on your mind?

William Kentridge, from Lulu