



LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

SELECT COMMITTEE ON END OF LIFE CHOICES IN THE ACT

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Submission Cover Sheet

End of Life Choices in the ACT

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End of Life Choices Committee Submission

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Dear Legislative Assembly Committee,

RE: End of Life Choices Committee Submission

Thank you for this opportunity to make a submission regarding End of Life Choices (EoLC). I had been a lifelong carer for my father whom had multiple chronic co-morbidities. Given his long term illnesses we had several heartfelt conversations over many years about how, as a family, we would envision my father's final days, and I can say it is entirely a devastating concept to have to consider. However, I am sure we would have much rather faced it with the confidence that when the time came that there be no pain and the least amount of suffering. We lived with utter anguish as we came to the realisation that committing suicide would be his only choice. My dad never wanted to implicate his beloved family in this process and therefore he would have had to die alone. Nobody should be forced to be alone when they leave this world but the threat of prosecution is too great to risk, especially for those of us with young families of our own.

As "luck" would have it my dad was diagnosed with kidney failure in February 2016, which required dialysis treatment three times a week. The diagnosis of kidney failure, coupled with his existing illnesses and a fall in respite care where he sustained a broken hip and spine, saw him hospitalised for the last 4 months of his life. I say luck because kidney failure became our most kind End of Life Choice. And on the 14th September 2016 my dad made the exceptionally tough but brave decision to cease dialysis and was moved to Clare Holland House for palliative care treatment. For years I had been by my dad's side as he had treatment for chronic diabetes including have toes amputated and going blind and choosing to cease dialysis was the "kindest" way to end his life. His body bloated from not being able to process and excrete the toxins building up in his body and although he remained able to communicate up to the last 12 hours of his life he was on constant opioids to keep the pain tolerable while not submitting him to a fully vegetative state. Please note that despite their best efforts there were periods where my father was in agony with nerve pain from his groin and writhing down his left leg which the doctor described as "would be excruciating"

+9.

Despite all of this I must say that the decision to move my father to Clare Holland House was easily the best decision we could make, given the circumstances. We were advised by the palliative care team, who visited Dad in hospital that he would not be able to receive the same level of pain management at home than he could in the hospice. We can't be anything but complementary about the outstanding support we received from the hospice staff throughout the week Dad was in the hospice and in the 18 months since his passing. We, the family and friends of Norbert Hagel OAM, could not have been more grateful.

I am a supporter of euthanasia but probably not for the reasons that one might think. I support the right for people to choose how to die, so that they, and their loved ones, don't have to contemplate the prospect of having their loved one die alone by their own hand. Nobody who loves their family as much as my dad loved his should be made to die alone. It is a large black cloud that hangs over those with chronic illnesses and their carers. A doctor once said that my dad would not likely see my sixteenth birthday and he fought valiantly through many hospitalisations to see my 38th, so if you are concerned that people would "throw away their lives" that is very much not the case. People who spend their entire lives fighting chronic illness know the value of each and every day and they

wouldn't frivolously throw it away. It is more a matter of allowing them the peace of mind to know that when it becomes too unbearable, when there is no more treatment available and when there is no prospect of "getting better", that they get to choose to end their lives on their own terms and in the presence of those they hold dear.

Kind regards and thank you for your consideration of my submission

Ms Karin Hagel

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22 March 2018