

Appendix

TERMINAL ILLNESS AND CARE OF THOSE WHO ARE TERMINALLY ILL

In July 1995 the Victorian Council of Churches and the Executive of the National Council of Churches in Australia, representing a wide range of churches (including the Uniting Church), made strong statements rejecting euthanasia.

The “terminally ill” person is one who (according to professional medical opinion), is engaged in irreversible biological processes that will lead to imminent death. To quote Prof John Hinton: “Fatal conditions are often remarkably free from discomfort. There are the oft quoted words of the dying William Hunter, physician and anatomist, ‘If I had strength enough to hold a pen, I would write how easy and pleasant a thing it is to die’....Friends and relatives of the dying usually have little knowledge of the protective function of diminished consciousness. Someone about to die may look so ill, or be so confused in mind, that the onlookers mistake this for suffering and feel helpless because of their inability to relieve an imagined distress Nevertheless, many do suffer a lot in their mortal illness.” (Hinton J, *Dying*, Penguin Books Ltd, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England 1972, 23.)

Palliative care is essential to ensure comfort and peace for those who suffer. Despite all the progress that has been made, many patients, particularly in rural areas, do not have access to expert palliative care staff and facilities.

Wherever death takes place, the reflection of Dame Cicely Saunders is relevant to terminal care: “The phrase ‘watch with me’ comes from the story of Jesus facing death in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:38) and sums up the deepest need of any person facing death or desolation. It did not mean ‘take away’, it could not have meant ‘understand or explain’ – its simple and costly demand was to ‘stay there’.” (Saunders C, *The Management of Terminal Disease*, Edward Arnold 1978, 8.)

There is a better way than euthanasia to have “a good death” and to “die with dignity” and for doctors and nurses to “help patients to die” as comfortably as possible. This is achieved with the aid of pain control and palliative care. These we believe should be each person’s last rights.

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Assembly of Confessing Congregations of the Uniting Church in Australia

Social Responsibility Commission

A Christian Response to Euthanasia and Medically Assisted Suicide

Christians have traditionally been motivated by compassion to relieve suffering, heal the sick and support life. At the end of every life, death may include suffering, whether physical and/or existential.

Thanks to the widespread belief in autonomy and self-determination, some people believe that everyone should have the right to end their life when they wish, in order to avoid the pain and suffering of terminal illness. Members of Exit International go further; they argue for the right to end life even when illness is not terminal, if patients claim to have “no quality of life”.