

## A SILVER LINING STRENGTHENING DWD GROUPS

It seems so long ago. And it hadn't happened for a long time. On the weekend of 7th and 8th of March 2020, DWD Vic. had the pleasure of welcoming colleagues from all over Australia to the first Dying With Dignity conference to be held in Australia for over a decade.

A week later, borders started closing as we all hunkered down against the COVID pandemic. But there was a silver lining!

Since that conference 2 years ago, all DWD groups around Australia have kept in touch every couple of months, sharing experiences, lobbying tips and resources. It's meant we've built strong relationships and extended our networks – so that now, nothing will stop us until every citizen in Australia has access to compassionate, legal assisted dying. Granted, it may take a few more years and a change of federal government to deliver this to our friends in the ACT and NT, but we won't stop until that happens.

And it's not just within Australia. One of our South Australian colleagues, Anne Bunning, has become Australia's representative at the World Federation of

Right to Die Societies. In the past, Anne has been a senior executive in the public, private and community sectors and was for 6 years a chief of staff and policy advisor to ministers in state and federal governments. She's also been a CEO and chair of various boards in the public and community sectors.



*Meredith Doig*

So it's not surprising that she has already made her mark at the World Federation. At our November 2021 catch-up, she reported that some Right to Die Societies in other countries seem content to agree with the statement that assisted dying is "legally suicide". This is, of course, an anathema to us here in Australia, where we have been at pains to clarify that assisted dying is *not suicide*.

As Anne is arguing on our behalf, our opponents often try to use the word 'suicide' (as in 'physician-assisted suicide' or 'assisted suicide') to stigmatise VAD and to prevent law reform. The distinction is very important and must be maintained both here and overseas.

ASSISTED DYING	SUICIDE
Dying of a terminal illness, the person is making a choice about the manner of their death	Person is not otherwise dying
Requires 2 medical assessments of capacity, prognosis, and treatment option	No medical pathway or scrutiny
Person must have decision-making capacity and the decision must be enduring	Often impulsive, with mental illness involved
Death is peaceful and reliable, usually with loved ones around	Suicide is generally done alone, is often violent and can be easily botched
Effects on others generally positive	Can lead to terrible effects on others
The community is overwhelmingly in favour of legally available VAD	The community overwhelmingly wants to prevent suicide

# NEW DWDV BOARD MEMBER

We are delighted to welcome Marina Harris to the DWDV Board.

*My background is as an educator, consultant and injury management specialist. My early career in Visual Arts Education and particularly photographic darkroom practice, led to a particular interest in chemical and environmental exposures. As a result, I co-founded a consulting and advisory body that provided health and safety information for visual and performing artists and educators.*

*After completing a Graduate Diploma in Occupational Health Practice, I commenced a long career in Injury Management, providing advice, assistance and support to University staff with both compensable and non-compensable injuries. I played an active role in various policy, process and oversight accountabilities, including committee membership.*

*Although I have only recently joined DWDV as a Board member, voluntary assisted dying has been part of my conversation for over 25 years.*

*I remember taking my mother to hear Dr Rodney Syme speak at U3A and she, in turn, having robust discussions about VAD with her friends.*

*I witnessed my Aunty Delia die a painful death from pancreatic cancer in 2007. She was begging for someone to help her die. If only she had the opportunity then to make an informed end of life choice when she was handed her prognosis. She was terrified and she suffered a bad death.*

*Through educating, empowering and advocating I hope to work on the advancement of Voluntary Assisted Dying and look forward to contributing to the team on the Board of DWDV.*



Marina Harris

## CAN YOU HELP US WITH A DONATION?



We are deeply appreciative of the amazing work done by all our volunteers, but we also rely on the generosity of donors and other benefactors to help us support the right to individual end-of-life choices through voluntary assisted dying, advocate for improvements to current laws and provide support and education for individuals, organisations and communities.

With the end of the financial year on the horizon, would you consider making a donation to DWDV?

You can do so through our secure online form here: <https://www.dwdv.org.au/donation/>  
(All online donations are processed securely using Stripe.)

Alternatively, contact our office for details to make a payment by direct bank transfer or cheque.

We are a Deductible Recipient Charity, so all donations over \$2 are tax deductible.



**Email:** [dwdv@dwdv.org.au](mailto:dwdv@dwdv.org.au)

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# LILY HARFORD'S LAST REQUEST



"Knowing she is sliding into dementia, Lily Harford is ready to give up her life ... but can she persuade someone to commit the illegal act of taking it from her?"

The author, Joanna Buckley, writes fiction focused on the timeless roles, challenges and inner lives of women, scaffolded on important social and ethical issues.... *Lily Harford's Last Request* was inspired by the author's witnessing as a teenager the trauma and misery of her grandfather succumbing to dementia, then decades later her father begging his five children to help him die when he in turn began to lose his memory.

This powerful and extremely thought provoking book, addresses two critical societal issues, dementia and Assisted Dying.

Our wonderful DWDV Board member and radio star, GP Dr Nick Carr, interviewed author Joanna Buckley on Triple R about her book. Apart from some sound issues, it is a wonderful interview. You can listen to it around the 15-minute mark.

<https://www.rrr.org.au/explore/programs/radiotherapy/episodes/19358-radiotherapy-13-february-2022>

*Please note: This book details the suffering caused by dementia. Dementia is explicitly ruled out as a criterion for Voluntary Assisted Dying in the Australian States with VAD legislation and is not contemplated in any future legislation.*

## WELCOME TO HOLLAND

"Welcome to Holland" is a beautiful and very powerful piece of writing. It was written by the mother of a child with a disability. However, anyone whose life has irrevocably changed as a result of loss and grief will, we think, appreciate it.

Read it here:

<https://www.dwdv.org.au/welcome-to-holland-emily-perl-kingsley/>



## WANTED – YOUNG DWDV AMBASSADORS



The Covid pandemic has certainly led to greater public discussion and reflection around the subject of death. However, many people still only associate death with old age. Tragically, as we know, the young are not immune to illness, suffering and death. It is important that they become aware of end-of-life decision options.

We think it is vital that we engage with younger Australians. Young individuals seem more receptive to information shared by someone of a similar age and by someone with whom they can identify.

More information about this is on our website at:

<https://www.dwdv.org.au/wanted-young-dwdv-ambassadors/>

Do you know of a young individual who would be interested in acting as a "Young Ambassador" for DWDV and spread the word?

If you do, please contact our office!

# BOOK REVIEW: LIFE AFTER LIFE, BY KATE ATKINSON



*Dr Nick Carr*

Here at DWDV we're not just about making the twilight years and end of life as good as possible, but also about staying well and delaying this final phase as long as possible. Sometimes life throws curveballs we can't dodge, sometimes we make choices we regret – but what if you could go back and try again?

This is the question that British author Kate Atkinson asks in her wonderful novel, *Life After Life*.

Spoiler alert, I'm going to describe quite a lot of the content so that you get a flavour of the style. But if anything, I think understanding the book's narrative style will help enjoy it more.

Ursula is the central figure, the premise - what would happen if you could go back and try again, have another go at life?

Disconcertingly, the book begins in 1930 with Ursula at Hitler's table. She is clearly already well known to him and his cronies, and she takes out a gun to shoot him. One shot, darkness falls (darkness does a lot of falling in this book).

Then it goes back (there's a lot of going back too) to 1910; snow, her birth, the cord around her neck, one breath, falling, darkness...

... and more snow, being born, but this time a snip in time and she survives to become Ursula, the little bear. Only to drown at the seaside age 4...

... in this version, she is saved from drowning by a seaside painter, but Maurice, her older brother drops her knitting doll out of the window, Ursula tries to rescue her but falls, as does darkness. Again.

It's some relief that Ursula finally survives as far as the Armistice. She and Bridget, the servant girl and her sweetheart, go to London for the celebrations, but come home with influenza, which infects Ursula. Once more one breath, falling, darkness. Several versions of Bridget and the flu follow, but each end with Ursula contracting the disease and dying.

Ursula is now beginning to get premonitions from her previous lives. Not knowing why, in the next version she pushes poor Bridget who hurts herself, but not enough to

stop her going to the parade and the deadly influenza that follows. Charmingly, at this point she writes, "Darkness, and so on."

Next time she does it properly, shoves Bridget down the stairs, arm broken, no parade and hey presto! No flu. But by now we know that this does not mean salvation, and several further, inevitably fatal, scenarios follow.

Because of her increasing episodes of déjà vu, Ursula is sent to a psychiatrist, the rather wonderful Dr Kellet, who has the sense not to label her or do anything other than the Talking Cure. There are other glorious characters, such as her Aunt Izzie, disgracefully pregnant at 16, and her brother Teddy, whose appearance in this book foreshadows his reappearance as the protagonist of Kate's next book, *A God In Ruins*.

What could have been a frustrating or tedious premise is brilliantly handled, kept fresh and engaging, and somehow I forgot what was likely to happen. And it didn't happen every time, so it wasn't predictable. She would survive (or not) seemingly at random (like life?). Kate uses a lot of brackets (note mine), but effectively (unlike mine), and there is much writing to relish. Here is just one example from near the end of the book:

'Kittens were in continual abundance on the farm, there was a kind of kitten currency in the neighbourhood, they were bartered for all kinds of emotional regret or fulfilment by parents - a doll lost, an exam passed.'

A kitten currency – delicious writing.

The characters are a beautiful mix of the lovely and believable (Ursula herself, her dad Hugh, brother Teddy), the complex (mum Sylvie, Aunt Izzie) and downright horrible (brother Maurice).

Kudos to any book that can move my hardened old heart to tears – this one did at several points. It's clever, thought-provoking, original and beautifully written and a deserving winner of the Costa Novel Award. Well done Kate. I wasn't a great fan of her first book, *Behind The Scenes At The Museum* (also an award winner), but this, and the sequel, are highly recommended.

# VAD SUPPORT GROUP

Since our last newsletter we have been contacted by individuals who have supported loved ones on their VAD journey and, some from those currently navigating the process. The goodwill and concern for others, shown by these people, never ceases to amaze us, as they selflessly offer their time and compassion to listen to the stories of others also affected by the VAD experience.

Many of you will be familiar with the story of Cheryl's father Jim, whose VAD story we found inspiring. Prior to his death Jim, prompted by his wonderful daughter, sent some words of appreciation to the staff that had helped him along his VAD path. Jim was an avid gardener and especially loved his sunflowers. Jim and Cheryl decided a few of his 'home grown' sunflower seeds should be included with the letters. By dispersing these seeds, he and Cheryl hoped that they would also spread the word about Voluntary Assisted Dying.

We have been provided with Jim's sunflower seeds and will attach some to our new "VAD support group" cards.

Please contact us if you, or someone you know, would like further information about our support group.



## SOCIAL MEDIA

Recently, a few of our Facebook posts have initiated a lot of emotive discussion. Most notably was the topic of dementia and the inability of an affected individual to request a voluntary assisted death.

We have received many messages of gratitude from those who have seen on our website a map of Victoria, that indicates the location of Aged Care Facilities that allow for the provision of VAD, or specific stages of the process, on their premises.

Contributors to our FB site have brought to our attention the occurrence of cases, in rural Victoria, in which those seeking access to VAD, have been severely impeded because of a lack of VAD GP/Specialist providers. This problem has been further exacerbated by legal restrictions which prevent individuals seeking VAD telehealth consultations.

We have received a lot of positive feedback about DWDV's Advance Care Directive, which can be downloaded from our website. It is one of the very few, if any, directives in which a section specifically refers to dementia.

We thank everyone for their contributions and are grateful for the ensuing respectful discourse.



### Update to Our History on the DWDV Website

We are grateful to Moya Palmer for providing us with corrections to some historical data we had been using. And to Helga Kuhse for further information on the progress of DWDV. We have updated our website, noting the original members from 1974. (<https://www.dwdv.org.au/about-us/history/>)

# NEWS FROM AUSTRALIA...

## New South Wales

The big news from NSW, in early February, was of the tabling of the report of the Upper House Inquiry into the VAD bill. Comments in the report appeared quite neutral and merely recommended the bill be debated in the Upper House. It was subsequently introduced into the Legislative Council by Adam Searle MLC. Five hours of Upper House parliamentary time was allocated to the second reading of the Bill.

DWDNSW President, Penny Hackett succinctly summed up the ongoing debate, "We are feeling hopeful but not complacent - we've learned that NSW Parliament is a very unpredictable place." Parliament will not sit again until May 11. Thirty-three of the 42 MLCs have now spoken, 24 of whom, have indicated their belief that terminally ill people should have VAD as an end-of-life choice.

A jointly run campaign by DWDNSW and Go Gentle Australia, "They Died Waiting" has proved to be extremely effective and powerful. Placards were held outside Parliament House and at rallies, displaying the faces of just some of the many people who have died horrendous deaths whilst waiting for VAD laws to be passed in NSW.

## Northern Territory

The Northern Territory News reported that Senator Sam McMahon will stand as a Liberal Democrat (not Country Liberal) at the forthcoming federal election. If she is elected (unlikely) she will continue to push for Territories' rights.

## Queensland

Applications have been sought for membership of the Queensland Voluntary Assisted Dying Review Board.



## South Australia

Unfortunately, the South Australian government appears to be in no hurry to set an implementation date for the VAD legislation that was passed in mid-2021. VADSA, Voluntary Assisted Dying South Australia, and advocates have been pressuring the government to announce an implementation date this year.

South Australians have been advised that the Implementation Taskforce will review the planned VAD commencement date of March 2023, by June 30 this year. Voluntary Assisted Dying South Australia held a public meeting on 3 April, hoping to pressure MPs into implementing VAD into the state this year and not, as previously indicated, March next year. Absolutely wonderful Victorian VAD advocate, Cheryl McKenna, spoke about her father's VAD journey.

## Tasmania

Tasmania's VAD implementation date is October 23 this year. Details have been provided about the Tasmanian VAD Commission, a VAD Navigator service, VAD Statewide Pharmacy service and VAD training and guidelines. A lawyer has been appointed head of the Tasmanian VAD Commission (which will be starting its role in May) and the head of the Tasmanian VAD Navigation service will commence work on April 22. The mandatory, Tasmania-specific VAD training course for practitioners is currently in development. Once it is completed, it has to be approved by the VAD Commission before it is made available. The availability of the training will be widely communicated once it is available, and it will be available prior to the commencement of the Act so that there is time for it to be completed before voluntary assisted dying becomes a lawful option.

## Western Australia

In Western Australia a forum was held in February that reflected on the first six months of VAD implementation. During the three-hour online forum, it was revealed that the demand for VAD had been three times greater than had been anticipated and that 68% of VAD deaths had resulted from practitioner administration.

# ...AND AROUND THE WORLD

## Canada

Canada is looking at broadening the MAiD eligibility criteria. Amongst the desired criteria is the contentious subject of allowing those suffering solely from mental illness to be considered. Canadians with dementia are asking the Government to be allowed to make an advance request for MAiD and supporters of MAiD are campaigning against the 'forced transfers' of individuals living in facilities that will not allow MAiD to be practised, to accommodating facilities. Canadian MD Dr Stefanie Green's recently released book "This is Assisted Dying" continues to gain attention world-wide.

## Colombia

There have now been 2 assisted deaths in Colombia in recent months, for individuals whose deaths were not considered imminent.

## Ireland

The husband of an Irish right-to-die advocate, who died in 2013, is set to lead the Irish branch of Exit International which has officially launched its campaign ahead of a national VAD debate.

## Italy

Despite the Pope again condemning 'euthanasia', an Assisted Dying bill has been adopted by Italy's lower house of parliament and the legislation will now move to the Senate.

## Korea

The JoonAng Daily reports that the discussion about the need for an assisted dying law is beginning in Korea. Like Japan, Korea has a very large proportion of the population in the older age groups and the author believes the matter is urgent. Korea still at the start of the road to dying well.



## Netherlands

Golden butterflies have been placed on the wall of the The Euthanasia Expertise Centre, in memory of the thousands of individuals who have chosen to die with dignity over the last 20 years. This centre "is the only one of its kind, giving information, assisting medical doctors and providing euthanasia as end-of-life care' and was legalised in a world first in the Netherlands on April 1, 2002.

## New Zealand

It was reported that in the first 3 months of VAD implementation, at least 28 people have died.

## United Kingdom

Humanists UK reports on a current consultation by the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) about its guidance on homicide. In 2009 the CPS issued prosecution guidelines which gave some protection to those who assist people to die, as long as their motives are altruistic. Now it is looking to extend this to "mercy killing" and "suicide pacts". It seems that if the parliament won't act, the justice system will!

## United States

The state of Oregon will no longer require people to be residents of the state to use its law allowing terminally ill people to end their own lives.

# DWDV BOARD



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## THANK YOU TO OUR VAD WITNESSES

We have recently supplied witnesses for the final documentation step in the VAD process for the 200th time!

A big thank you to all our volunteers for giving up their time to help others - sometimes at very short notice.

A reminder that you can find out more about VAD Witnesses and Contact People by visiting our website here:

<https://www.dwdv.org.au/other-resources/witnessess-and-contact-people/>

