



## RIGHT-TO-DIE GRANNY, 86, STARVES HERSELF TO DEATH

This sensational headline appeared on the front page of the Sunday Times on October 19th, with a full-page report about how Jean Davies starved herself to death on an inside page.

Jean Davies had become a Supporter of SOARS only a few weeks after its establishment in December 2009. She had been a Chairperson of the Voluntary Euthanasia Society (1985-1990), and a President of both Right-to-Die Europe and the World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies (1990-1992). Jean had known Michael Irwin, the Co-ordinator of SOARS, for twenty years, and when she decided, in her 87th year, to end her life because various health problems were finally greatly restricting her activities, she asked him to arrange for a journalist to interview her. The result was the “exclusive report” in the Sunday Times which also referred to SOARS and the fact that Jean Davies felt her life was now “complete” – her death was an example of old age rational suicide. But, if she had lived in Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, or Switzerland, she could have been actively assisted to die by her personal doctor.

On October 20th, newspapers throughout the UK published summaries of what had appeared in the Sunday Times: in particular, the Daily Mirror also referred at length to SOARS. And, Jean’s oldest daughter, Bronwen, was interviewed on several radio and TV programmes (ranging from BBC Radio Four to Channel 4 TV News).

On October 26th, the Sunday Times had a further report about other elderly individuals who had also starved themselves to death; and, it printed a letter which mentioned the ICM March 2013 national poll, commissioned by SOARS, that indicated that 70% of people in the UK supported the concept of old age rational suicide.

## FIFTH ANNUAL SOARS LECTURE

This was given, in central London, on October 31st, by Dr. Jan Bernheim, a medical oncologist, on “The Belgian Model of Integral End-of-Life Care”. Dr. Bernheim, an Emeritus Professor at the Vrije University in Brussels, has been much involved in the development of palliative care and voluntary euthanasia in Belgium for many years.

A summary of this lecture is on the SOARS website ([www.soars.org.uk](http://www.soars.org.uk)) under “Annual Lecture”. In particular, Dr. Bernheim had noted that, in recent years in Belgium, “Irreversible, intolerable suffering is also the justification for euthanasia for some elderly patients with a number of chronic incurable ailments who, with the additional loss of dignity and independence, have reached the stage of a completed life”



## SOARS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – OCTOBER 31ST

At this AGM, held after the annual SOARS lecture, a report on recent activities was made (the main events are recorded in the six-monthly newsletters); by-laws were formally adopted; Dr. Elizabeth Wilson (the founder, and initial Convenor, of Friends At The End) was appointed as the first SOARS Patron; the 2015 budget (with an expected expenditure of only £3,700 – this sum will be raised by donations from our Supporters) was approved; and the 2014-15 Executive Council was elected (at a subsequent meeting of this Council, on the same day, it was decided that Michael Irwin should remain as the SOARS Co-ordinator; Phil Cheatle became the Associate Co-ordinator; David Pattison will be the Treasurer; Angela Farmer will be the Secretary; and Gill Vincent is the additional member).

In the coming year, SOARS will be focusing a great deal on “What constitutes a Completed Life?”, involving its Supporters, and the general public, in this discussion. Also, every present SOARS Supporter will be encouraged to enrol a relative or friend to become a Supporter as well.

## OTHER MEETINGS

During the past six months, talks about old age rational suicide have been made to groups in Brighton (June 4th and also on September 24th – the latter event was at an arts festival which considered “The New Immortals”), and in North London (October 9th). Meetings of the three existing Die-alogue Groups (composed of local SOARS Supporters) have been held in North London, South London, and in Brighton.

SOARS was represented at the conference, on July 14th at the Royal Society of Medicine in London, organized by Alzheimer’s Research UK and the International Longevity Centre-UK, on “Dementia – where next?”

At the biennial global conference of the World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies (which consists of fifty-two right-to-die societies, including SOARS, from twenty-five countries), held in Chicago in mid-September, Liz Nichols represented SOARS – she is one of the four founding Supporters. “Old Age Rational Suicide” was one of the two new major subjects discussed during this meeting (the other was “Dementia”), and the main paper on this subject was written by SOARS (this can be seen on the SOARS website). At this conference, Michael Irwin was given the Tenrei Ohta Award, which is presented to “the individual who has been a major international influence benefiting the global right-to-die movement in the past two years”.

The next London FATE-SOARS meeting will be held on Friday, April 10th, at 2.30pm, at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, WC1 – then, Dr. Colin Brewer, a retired psychiatrist, will be talking about “Dementia”.

## MEDIA REPORT

Radio interviews, in which SOARS has been mentioned, following a specific right-to-die event (eg: Lord Falconer’s Bill, or comments on “old age” by Mary Berry), were given on BBC London (May 14th); BBC Kent, and BBC West Midlands (July 17th); LBC (July 19th); LBC (August 23rd); BBC Radio Scotland, and BBC Tees (September 2nd); and LBC (October 17th).

And, newspaper comments have appeared in the Daily Telegraph (May 2nd), Mail on Sunday (June 15th), and the Daily Telegraph (October 17th) – in particular, the last report, under the front-page heading of “Guidelines on assisted suicide are relaxed” (by the Director of Public Prosecutions), quoted Michael Irwin (“It would make life a lot easier for people like me; it would mean I could help any individual go to Switzerland and not worry about it”)

## HOUSE OF LORDS DEBATE – JULY 18TH

At this all-day consideration of Lord Falconer's Assisted Dying Bill (which is limited to only the "terminally ill"), it was most interesting that several Peers broadened the debate. For example, Lord Harries noted "If we are moved by compassion for people who have only six months to live, how much more do we feel compassion for someone who may have a totally incapacitated life ahead of them for years...it is totally inconsistent to argue for autonomy in the case of those who are dying and not others who may be in even greater distress". Baroness Neuberger stated that "Six months seems arbitrary and...possibly unkind because suffering that is longer than six months is suffering that we should take even more seriously". And, Lord Brown quoted a June 25th statement by the President of the Supreme Court (Lord Neuberger) – "There seems to me to be significantly more justification in assisting people to die if they have the prospect of living many years a life that they regarded as valueless, miserable and often painful, than if they have only a few months left to live".

## SEVERAL INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

In May, the two main Swiss right-to-die organizations (which only provide a medically-assisted suicide to Swiss nationals) – EXIT Deutsche Schweiz, in Zurich; and EXIT Suisse Romande, in Geneva – announced that they would now officially allow their elderly members, suffering from health problems linked to old age, the choice to end their life. Dr. Jerome Sobel, the president of the latter group, noted that "forcing them to continue living can be torture... we are helping people who are sick and opt for quality of life over a quantity of time surviving with a poor quality of life".

In June, Tania Pisa, from Toronto, interviewed Michael Irwin for a film she is producing on "Assisted Dying". And, in July, Pam Olivier, from the University of Auckland Law School, consulted him for an international research project on "Assisted Dying Legislation".

## USEFUL QUOTES

*"Elderly and frail patients should sometimes be allowed to die rather than receive treatments that prolong but do not improve their lives...Society these days is much less familiar with death, and is most reluctant to accept mortality"* **Dr James Beattie, a cardiologist, on BBC Radio Four, July 31, 2014.**

*"We have lead five couples into a peaceful death within our work of the past eighteen months...there is nothing more beautiful than spending forty to sixty years together and then the possibility to hold hands, give each other a last kiss and then sleep into eternity for ever"*

**Dr. Erika Preisig, Director of Lifecircle, near Basle, Switzerland, quoted in the July 2014 Newsletter of the World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies**

*"In strictly observing the sanctity of life, the Church could now actually be promoting anguish and pain, the very opposite of a Christian message of hope"*

**Lord Carey (former Archbishop of Canterbury), in the Daily Mail, July 12, 2014.**

*"In 2010, there were 12,640 centenarians in the UK. This number is projected to increase to 160,000 by 2040, and over half a million by 2066"* **From a booklet issued by the International Longevity Centre-UK on July 14, 2014.**