



SOARS GOES NATIONAL

The first Annual SOARS Lecture was to have been given in late September, in Brighton where SOARS was established last December. However, during June and July, staff from BBC Radio Four interviewed several individuals for a programme on “Choosing a Time to Die”, and requested SOARS to arrange for a national poll to be held – as a follow-up to the Brighton and Hove poll done in February. Therefore, it was decided that this Lecture would now be given in London (during the state visit of the Pope to the UK).

On September 17th, Lady Mary Warnock, the distinguished educator and moral philosopher, gave the first ANNUAL SOARS LECTURE, on “Easeful Death for the Very Elderly”, at the Draycott Education Centre, in central London, to an audience in which there were many members from Friends At The End as well as from the Society for Old Age Rational Suicide.

A summary of Lady Warnock’s talk is given on the SOARS website (under “[Annual Lecture](#)”). Several comments from her lecture were reported in The Daily Telegraph on September 20th.

During the evening of September 20th, the BBC RADIO FOUR programme was broadcast throughout the UK. In this, Nan Maitland, a founding member of SOARS, spoke frankly about her personal views for a rational suicide, and in the interview with Michael Irwin, the SOARS Co-ordinator, the establishment of SOARS was reported, along with the main results of the latest ICM poll.

NATIONAL ICM POLL – JULY

In this poll, which occurred between July 2nd and 4th, a total of 1,009 telephone interviews were made by ICM – with quotas being set by age, gender and region, and then weighed to achieve a nationally representative sample of UK adults.

In response to the frequently-asked question, regarding whether or not a doctor should be legally allowed to assist a terminally-ill individual to die, the usual result, which showed a 78 per cent support, was obtained.

But, of very particular interest to SOARS, when these 1,009 adults were asked “Do you agree or disagree that a mentally competent, very elderly individual, who is suffering from a variety of serious health problems that they will not die from, should be legally allowed to receive a doctor’s assistance to die, if this is their persistent request”, 67 per cent expressed their support, and only 19 per cent said that they were opposed to this possibility, with the rest being uncertain. This result is very similar to that obtained in the Brighton and Hove poll in February.

An extensive report on this latest ICM poll appeared in The Daily Telegraph on August 16th, along with several quotes from the SOARS website.



ADVANCE DECISION CAMPAIGN – in BRIGHTON AND HOVE – during JUNE

This was a month-long campaign, which began with the advertisement (right) appearing in *The Argus*, the city's daily newspaper, on June 1st.

In addition, The Argus website regularly repeated statements which both stressed that "A Living Will (or Advance Decision) allows you to state in advance what medical care you want to receive if you should become so ill or disabled that you cannot speak for yourself", and also drew attention to the SOARS website – in total, about 50,000 "hits" were recorded. Leaflets were distributed in Brighton and Hove, and there was a 24-hour telephone hotline which, during June, received seventy-four calls.



Safeguard your future medical care

Imagine yourself with a serious dementia, or paralysed and speechless because of a major stroke. Doctors are very uncertain how to treat you. But, as you are unable to communicate with them, they may treat you against your wishes.

An Advance Decision (popularly still called a Living Will) allows you to state in advance what medical care you want to receive if you should become so ill or disabled that you cannot speak for yourself. In this document, you can either refuse further treatment which would prolong your life (such as tube-feeding or being on a life-support machine) or you can request being kept alive for as long as possible, subject to medical consent.

Since 2007, in England and Wales, Living Wills or Advance Decisions are legally binding documents. They allow you to take responsibility for your medical care, ensuring that you retain your dignity and autonomy, right up to the end. Most people have a will covering their financial affairs - it makes sense to have a corresponding statement on one's future medical care.

Advance Decisions are fully supported by the British Medical Association, the General Medical Council, the Royal College of Nursing, and the Law Society. Living Wills can be of considerable benefit to your family and friends, relieving them of the burden of responsibility about what you want. Also, in an Advance Decision, you can name a Health Care Proxy (a relative or close friend) who can explain your wishes and expectations if these should be unclear.

You can download your Advance Decision form, free of charge, from the website of Compassion in Dying (www.compassionindying.org.uk).

If you have any questions about Living Wills, please telephone 07715 151 355 any day of the week.



(This statement has been funded by the Society for Old Age Rational Suicide: this group's logo, shown left, is the derelict West Pier, once a place of great excitement and pleasure. Last February, SOARS commissioned a poll of 1,000 Brighton and Hove residents which showed 67% support for very elderly, competent adults, suffering unbearably from various health problems, being legally allowed to receive a doctor's assistance to die: only 18% disagreed, and the remaining 15% were uncertain.)

SOCIETY FOR OLD AGE RATIONAL SUICIDE

www.soars.org.uk

TWO INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

At the biennial conference of the World Federation of Right-to-Die Societies, held in MELBOURNE in early October, Michael Irwin presented a paper on "Old Age Rational Suicide: Developments in The Netherlands, Switzerland and England", which provided details of the two ICM polls that had taken place in 2010. He stressed that, while the main priority for all right-to-die organizations, at present, should be focused on how to assist terminally-ill individuals to die, increasing consideration should also be given to helping, in a similar way, the growing number of very elderly, competent persons, throughout the world, who are suffering from various health problems.

SOARS has become a financial supporter in the production of a short film which is being made in NEW YORK called "Nemo Nisi Mors" (Till Death Do Us Part) – this focuses on a very elderly couple ending their lives together.

A PRACTICAL EXAMPLE OF OARS

In December 2008, Chris, aged 90, a member of Friends At The End, had a doctor-assisted suicide in Switzerland because of several health problems (especially severe bouts of dizziness and memory loss) which were bothering him greatly: his wife was present with him when he died. Before he left England, Chris told Michael Irwin that he was “determined to end my life before my body fails me”.

USEFUL QUOTES

“If Granny walks up to the tribunal and bangs her walking stick on the table and says ‘Look, I’ve really had enough, I hate this bloody disease, and I’d like to die thank you very much young man’, I don’t see why anyone should stand in her way” – Sir Terry Pratchett (who has been diagnosed with early Alzheimer’s disease), quoted in *The Guardian*, February 1, 2010.

“People will choose when to end their lives in the future, because anti-ageing drugs that extend lifespans by many years are likely to become commonplace” – Dr. David Gems (at a meeting of the Royal Society, in London), quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, May 12, 2010.

In the UK, “On current trends, a quarter of all babies will live long enough to celebrate their 100th birthday”: Steve Webb, the Pensions Minister, said: “We cannot ignore our ageing society”, quoted in *The Daily Telegraph*, August 5, 2010.

“Medical breakthroughs mean that increasing numbers of us are going on until our eighties and nineties, but we are often doing so in a state of confusion and incapacity...The quality of our existence may be terrible, but medical ethics and social norms won’t let us die...it is a form of collective stupidity for us not to recognise that although we can keep lives going, there comes a point where they are not worth living” – Jenni Russell, a columnist, in *The Sunday Times*, September 19, 2010.

HUMAN RIGHTS BASIS for SOARS

SOARS was established, in the city of Brighton and Hove, on December 10, 2009. The importance of “December 10” is that it is observed internationally as Human Rights Day because the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted on December 10, 1948.

Moving forward fifty-four years, it was a progressive step when the European Court of Human Rights in April 2002 (regarding the appeal made to it by Diane Pretty, who suffered from motor neurone disease), noted that “In an era of growing medical sophistication, combined with longer life expectancies, many people are concerned that they should not be forced to linger on in old age or in states of advanced physical or mental decrepitude which conflict with strongly held ideas of self and personal identity”. This important statement gives SOARS a solid foundation for its existence.

