



### FOURTH ANNUAL SOARS LECTURE

This talk – on “Dying Assistance for the Elderly in The Netherlands” – was given by Dr. Rob Jonquiere, a Dutch doctor who is a former CEO of the main Dutch right-to-die society (the NVVE, which has 130,000 members today), in central London, on September 20th.

In particular, Dr. Jonquiere noted that “the Royal Dutch Medical Association has decided that, as most elderly persons who say that their lives are now completed will have many minor, age-related ailments and problems, these may jointly constitute sufficient basis to call this a degree of suffering which can be considered as unbearable and hopeless, and so fulfil one of the most important criteria of the present Dutch law”.

An extensive summary of Dr. Jonquiere’s lecture can be seen on the SOARS website ([www.soars.org.uk](http://www.soars.org.uk)), under “Annual Lecture”.

### OTHER PUBLIC MEETINGS

Michael Irwin, the SOARS Co-ordinator, was in a debate (“My Body, My Choice”) with George Galloway, the Respect MP, and Dr. Philip Graham, a member of Dignity in Dying’s Board, on May 28th, at “How The Light Gets In”, the philosophy and music festival at Hay on Wye. Also, he spoke at a Conway Hall event, in London, on June 2nd; participated in The Open University’s (Milton Keynes) 11th Death, Dying and Disposal conference on September 5th; and was a main speaker at a Fabrica-sponsored discussion on “Nothing Lasts Forever (nor should it)”, held in a former Regency church, in Brighton, on October 24th.

### EXAMPLES of OLD AGE RATIONAL SUICIDE

In June, Monty, aged 90, suffering from macular degeneration and peripheral neuritis, travelled to Switzerland for a doctor-assisted suicide.

In July, Neil, in his 85th year, with multiple sclerosis, made the same final journey.

And, in September, Leslie, aged 81, with lung cancer, also ended his life in Switzerland.

Two SOARS Supporters, Andrew and Patricia, have separately been in Switzerland to meet with EX International colleagues to consider their possible future options (a form of “insurance policy”).



## WIDESPREAD INTEREST in SOARS

In the magazine section of the (Sunday) New York Times (the most important US newspaper) of July 21st, Professor Margaret Battin, describing the difficulties faced by her seriously-ill husband, referred to SOARS as an organization “which defends the right of the ‘very elderly’ to choose death as a way to pre-empt old age catastrophes”. This resulted in many e-mails, requesting further information about SOARS, from the USA.

Then, postgraduate students from Canada (Britt Kewin, Goldsmiths, University of London), Finland (Emma Aav, University of Helsinki), Scotland (Joe Boyle, Glasgow University), and the USA (Vanessa Gravenor, Washington University in St. Louis) have met with Michael Irwin to discuss the activities of SOARS.

In June, in Rome, Liz Nichols and Michael Irwin represented SOARS at the biennial conference of Right-to-Die Europe (a regional grouping of right-to-die societies) when a progress report on SOARS was given and, in particular, discussions were held with colleagues from Belgium, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and Switzerland (countries where old age rational suicide is possible).

## DEMENTIA and SOARS

On May 30th, The Daily Mirror resurrected the fact that John, aged 83, with early dementia, had received a doctor-assisted suicide, in Switzerland, last March, with the large front-page headline of “Brit’s Dignitas Suicide to beat Dementia”. This led to the same event being reported, at length, in later editions of The Daily Express, The Independent, The Sun, and The Daily Telegraph, as well as the BBC Radio 4, on the same day; and, in The Daily Mail and The Times on the following day – all mentioned Michael Irwin’s involvement with helping John to travel to Zurich. In these newspaper reports, the headlines varied from “Why I helped a dementia sufferer to die at Dignitas” (The Daily Telegraph) to “Aided suicide ‘will increasingly be choice of dementia patients’” (The Times). Later, on July 14th, The Sunday Times reported extensively on an interview its Health Editor had with John’s widow – which referred again to the ICM national telephone poll, of early March, that showed 70% support for legalized doctor-assisted old age rational suicide.

SOARS strongly believes that a doctor-assisted suicide should be a serious option for those elderly individuals who unfortunately develop dementia as long as they have the mental capacity to make this choice – thus, it is reassuring that the NHS is now stressing the importance of early diagnosis of this disease.

## ADDITIONAL MEDIA COVERAGE of SOARS

During these six months, SOARS has participated in several radio interviews, whether it has been a general discussion on the “right-to-die” (draft Bills will be discussed in both the Edinburgh and Westminster Parliaments next year) or related to a specific court case. These interviews have ranged from BBC Wiltshire to Eagle Radio, in Surrey (July 31st); from BBC West Midlands (June 4th) to the Voice of Russia (September 18th); and from BBC Surrey Sussex (August 4th) to BBC Northern Ireland (October 6th).

Michael Irwin was extensively interviewed by Ritula Shah on “renouncing life in old age or when faced with a terminal illness”, on May 21st, in the BBC Radio 4 “One to One” series.

Newspaper and magazine reports, which mentioned SOARS, have appeared in the Brighton and Hove Argus (May 1st and August 18th), Ethical Record (July issue), MSN UK News (July 31st), and The Daily Mirror and The Daily Telegraph (August 19th).

This media coverage often results in radio listeners and newspaper readers searching for SOARS on the internet and then making contact to inquire about our activities, or to ask questions about travelling to Switzerland (for what one journalist recently called an “off-shore doctor-assisted suicide”).

## USEFUL QUOTES

*“By 2030, there will be 50% more over-65s – and more than double the number of over-85s – alive in England than in 2010.....and the numbers struggling with dementia will soar by 80% by 2030. The figures are sobering” – from a report in **The Guardian on May 15, 2013.***

*“I have watched many old people become more enfeebled, uncomfortable and powerless, and I don’t want to go down that route. I object to people with religious convictions telling other people how they should live their lives. I wish that the law did not look so grimly on those who might help one achieve one’s aim” – **Marion Bolton, in the Summer 2013 issue of Third Age Matters (from The University of the Third Age).***

*“When you look at severe, chronic conditions like dementia and Parkinson’s disease, where the progressive nature of it is going to be so dreadful and everyone knows what the natural progression is, then why can’t we make a grown-up decision about how we want to go? In the past 100 years, we have found so many ways to live and we live well, but actually we die really badly” – **Dr. Chai Patel, speaking at the National Care Homes Congress on July 9, 2013.***

*“The thought of suicide is a great comfort, for it is what I shall employ if mere existence is ever all that I have” – **Art critic Brian Sewell, reported in The Mail on Sunday, July 14, 2013.***

*“It’s important to give people with dementia choice and control over their life whenever possible” – **George McNamara, Head of Policy at the Alzheimer’s Society, speaking on September 3, 2013.***

*“NHS staff have banned the term ‘elderly’ from leaflets for fear of offending patients. The change, outlined by NHS Health Scotland, suggests health workers write ‘older people’ instead” – **from a report in The Daily Telegraph on September 30, 2013.***

*“The world is rapidly ageing – people over 60 years of age already exceed children under five, and by 2050 they will outnumber children under 15” – **Silvia Stefanoni, the Chief Executive of HelpAge International, on the publication of the Global Age Watch Index on September 30, 2013.***

