



HIGH PROFILE DEATHS IN SWITZERLAND

There have been several high profile cases of people travelling to Switzerland for medically assisted suicides, Elizabeth Coulouris, Gill Pharaoh and Simon Binner were all SOARS supporters. Gill Pharaoh wrote a clear statement explaining her decision, available here: yesiambovered.com/my-last-word/.

POLLS

Although SOARS has not conducted a poll this year. Several other polls are significant. On June 27th the Economist published results of polls in many countries. Its findings for UK included almost 60% in favour of medically assisted suicide for non-terminal patients with incurable conditions that cause unbearable physical suffering. (Significantly less than this if the suffering was mental rather than physical.) However in September SAGA found almost 2/3 of their sample of 10,000 favoured the opening of a branch of Dignitas in UK. Significantly, Dignitas do not restrict help to those who are terminally ill, nor to those with physical suffering. Link to the SAGA poll results [here](#).

PARLIAMENTARY DEFEATS

In May the Scottish parliament rejected an Assisted Suicide Bill (36 in favour, 82 against). The Bill was originally put forward by the late Margo MacDonald and later carried forward by MSP Patrick Harvie.

On September 11th the Assisted Dying Bill put forward by Rob Marris was debated in the House of Commons and was defeated, (118 in favour, 330 against). Prior to the debate, many of you contacted your MP as we had suggested, and Dignity in Dying ran a very high profile campaign. We are, of course disappointed by this result, though in SOARS we regard any Bill restricted to terminal illness as only a first step. We have a long way to go.

There were many concerns raised about the Marris Bill. Significant objections included the restriction to those who are terminally ill - many high profile cases would not have been eligible for help by this Bill; the protection of "vulnerable elderly people" who may be pressured unreasonably; the need for better hospice care as an alternative; and the belief that the present law is acceptable, when combined with the DPP guidelines which turn a blind eye to compassionate assisted suicide and murder. There are strong counter arguments to these objections, but the voices of "faith leaders" and palliative care organisations drowned them out. The attitude of Dignity in Dying and the British Humanist Association is that the campaign must now go back to the courts. SOARS will support any such activity, especially that of the BHA which, unlike DiD, does not restrict its campaign to the (6 months or less) terminally ill. Anyone who believes their situation would be a good legal focus should contact the SOARS Coordinator (mail@soars.org.uk)



GOOD NEWS FROM CALIFORNIA

On the other side of the pond the number of people who have the option of assisted dying will increase dramatically by 39 million. Legislation similar to Oregon was passed in California on 5th October. It is interesting to note that the population of California is similar to that of Netherlands, Belgium and Switzerland *combined*.

NEW SOARS COORDINATOR

At the end of August Michael Irwin, the founder of SOARS, decided to step down as its Coordinator. At 84, with various health issues, he felt it was time to retire. The executive committee, (EC), which Michael set up at the October 2014 AGM, was prepared for this and quickly voted Phil Cheatle to be the new SOARS Coordinator. (Phil has been the associate coordinator since October 2014). Michael has worked tirelessly for the right-to-die campaign for over 20 years. We wish him well in his retirement.

6TH ANNUAL SOARS LECTURE

This was given, on October 23rd in London, by Phil Cheatle, the incoming SOARS Coordinator. The topic was 'When is a Life Complete? What Next?'. The talk started by discussing the origins of the Completed Life concept and the work that has been done within SOARS over the past year to formulate our own definition. By using conceptual graphs of 'Quality of Life' vs 'Age' Phil explored some of the complexities people face when contemplating their own completed life decisions. The ideas were illustrated with examples of people's deaths which had recently been in the news.

The talk went on to suggest some ways that people can make use of the Completed Life concept in their conversations with others. It ended by proposing the concept of an "Extended Advance Decision" whereby at the time or writing a valid Advance Decision, someone formally sets out their wish for the option of a medically assisted suicide if at some point in the future, their quality of life irreversibly falls below the minimum quality they are prepared to accept. Such a statement would go a long way towards allaying any reasonable concerns that a "vulnerable elderly person" was being pressured into requesting a medically assisted suicide, when that eventually becomes a legal option in the UK.

A final version of the SOARS Completed Life document is now on the SOARS website. www.soars.org.uk under Publications. The lecture slides can be found under Lectures.

SOARS ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – OCTOBER 23RD

The members of the executive committee were introduced – Phil Cheatle (Coordinator), Colin Brewer (Associate Coordinator), Caro Bailey (Secretary), David Pattison (Treasurer), and Gill Vincent. Thanks were expressed to Angela Farmer who stood down as Secretary. New members Caro and Colin were welcomed. Michael Irwin gave a report on recent activities. The budget was discussed with an expected expenditure of £10,000. A motion was passed that supporters would be asked for an annual donation, with a suggested minimum of £15. Michael was voted to become the second patron of SOARS. The EC are very pleased that he wishes to retain an active involvement, and welcome his continuing guidance and assistance.

The next FATE/SOARS meeting will be held on Saturday 9th April 2016 at Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, WC1 when Dr Elizabeth Wilson, SOARS patron and former convenor of FATE, will talk on 'Thirty Years as a Right-to-Die Activist'.



EXHIBITIONS IN BRISTOL

There are two interesting exhibitions at the Bristol City Museum and Art Gallery. SOARS has been taking part on the advisory board. Phil Cheatle appears in some video interviews.

Death: the Human Experience encourages people to consider ethical issues, different attitudes to death and how different cultures have dealt with the end of life. It opened on 22nd October 2015.

Death: Is it your right to choose? This will encourage debate and discussion around end of life choices. It will be based around a reconstruction of the Dignitas room in Switzerland. The exhibition will be supported by a series of events starting on 26th January with a panel debate on assisted dying with Silvan Luley from Dignitas and other experts from the UK. Both exhibitions run until 13th March 2016.

For more info:

www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-museum-and-art-gallery/whats-on/death-human-experience/

www.bristolmuseums.org.uk/bristol-museum-and-art-gallery/whats-on/death-is-it-your-right-to-choose/

QUOTES

"To keep someone alive against their wishes is the ultimate indignity."

"I would consider assisted suicide only if I were in great pain or felt I had nothing more to contribute but was just a burden to those around me."

Stephen Hawking, Physicist, [The Guardian 3rd June 2015](#)

(Note use of "or"!)

"I feel my life is complete and I am ready to die. ... I have to take action early on because no one else will be able to take action for me."

Gill Pharaoh, My Last Word, yesiambovvered.com/my-last-word/ July 2015

"I agree that the law should take a considered and compassionate approach to caring relatives who are asked by those closest to them to help bring their lives to an end."

Justin Welby, Archbishop of Canterbury, [The Guardian 5th September 2015](#)

(So the Archbishop appears to advocate turning a blind eye to unregulated and illegal assisted suicide and murder. SOARS says an emphatic "NO!". We do not want to rely on hopefully well meaning, but emotionally involved amateurs, who may not understand all the options available, without safeguards involving multiple independent professionals, and without access to the drugs that, when used properly, can bring life to a calm and peaceful end. For the archbishop to suggest that people being driven to this tragic and traumatic criminal behaviour is a sensible solution to the serious problems with the current law shows callous disregard to the suffering of both those who rationally and consistently feel their life is complete, but are unable or unwilling to go to Switzerland, and those who try to help them. The fact that so many MPs appear to agree with the Archbishop, while ignoring the vast majority of their voters, is very regrettable. The right-to-die movement in this country has a lot of work to do.)