

The Compassion Report

Spring 2003

Compassion in Dying of Oregon

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FIFTH YEAR REPORT CONTINUING UNBLEMISHED RECORD

On March 6 the Oregon Department of Human Services issued its fifth annual report. It was published in the New England Journal of Medicine for the 5th straight year, indicating the medical importance of the report and its national significance. In 2002, 37 terminally ill Oregonians chose to take the medication to hasten their death compared to 21 in 2001, 27 in 2000, 27 in 1999 and 16 in 1998. The annual average for the first five years has been less than 26 persons per year.

As important as are the numbers of people who took the medication it is equally important that the report shows there were no complications encountered by those who did take the medication and that end-of-life care continues to improve in Oregon.

The average age of those taking the medication remains constant at 68 and the most common underlying illness is cancer. In addition, the primary reasons for wishing to have the option has not changed; those being fear of loss of autonomy and loss of control of bodily functions.

In 2002, 27 of the 38 who chose to take the medication were men.

According to Compassion's internal records 30 of the 38 persons who used aid-in-dying were Compassion clients. We also represented 47 of the 58 who received the medication in 2002. CIDO continues to represent more than 75% of all terminally ill Oregonians seeking use of the law. Our data shows that an overwhelming number of clients have education levels in excess of the state and national averages, are self-identified as religious or spiritual, have health insurance, and are enrolled in hospice at the time of their death.

The respect CIDO has earned may be measured by the fact 74% of all of our referrals come from health care professionals and hospice personnel. CIDO is also now listed on the Oregon Dept. of Human Service's form as a source of how doctors learn of the death of their patients.

AZ, HI & VT May Soon Join Oregon

Three states may join Oregon in passing Death with Dignity laws. Arizona, where the legislature is debating a bill only slightly different than Oregon's law, could vote on the bill within the next few months. With a population of 5.2 million

Arizona would be the largest populated state with such a law.

Vermont's lawmakers are now starting the committee hearings on their version of Oregon's law. Again the bill is quite similar to ours. Vermont's population at 600,000 would be the smallest state to have a right to die law.

Finally, Hawaii, where the lower house passed the bill last year only to have it fail by two votes in the upper chamber, is reconsidering the same death with dignity bill. This time around supporters are planning their strategy very carefully and anticipate passage sometime next year. Hawaii's 1.2 million citizens support the law by more than 60%.

Oregon representatives are working closely with legislators in these three states. Oregon's experience in passing the law is invaluable to supporters of these bills. Oregon has led so others may follow.

Executive Director's Corner (George Eighmey)

When war in Iraq, the stock market plummeting, gas prices skyrocketing, consumer confidence at a 30 year low, and unemployment at an all time high, it might seem strange to read that we are very optimistic about Compassion's future. One thing is for certain, it can't get much worse before we turn the corner.

At Compassion there are signs things are getting better. We have seen a steady improvement in end-of-life care during the past five years, not only in Oregon, but in all states. Oregon continues to be a leader in the nation in the use of morphine for pain control, the number of people who die comfortably at home, the percentage of our population who are enrolled in hospice care, and as the model for others in implementing the only aid-in-dying law in the US.

Articles written by scholars continue to extol the positive impact the law has had on end-of-life care.

Attorney General Ashcroft's attempts to overturn Oregon's law are misguided mainly because he wishes to take away the benefits provided by our law and replace them with fear and suffering. His action has angered thousands of Oregonians. He has failed to understand that the moral foundation of our law lies within the principle, expressed in the Declaration of Independence, that the freedom to live or die by the consequences of one's own choices is an inalienable right.

During the 1992 presidential campaign Bill Clinton used a simple phrase to bring home the point that the American people were more concerned about their financial well being than they were about the success of then President Bush during the first Gulf war. A bit of a twist on Clinton's campaign slogan might be directed to Mr. Ashcroft. **"It's all about options, John, not about you."** It is our right to choose to die with dignity on our own terms. Mr. Ashcroft's personal beliefs do not trump the decision of the Oregon voter. There is no rational or secular basis to prevent us from using Oregon's physician aid-in-dying law. Join us at the Federal Courthouse in Portland on May 7 to hear the arguments in the Oregon vs. Ashcroft case. Call for details.

Compassion Speaks Out

Compassion's story was told by our volunteers and staff to more than 2000 people during 30 separate presentations throughout Oregon in 2002.

Attendees ranked our presentations from great to excellent. Many told us they had no idea that Compassion provided such a full range of assistance to its clients. They also did not know that we work so closely with hospice. Others volunteered to be a part of Compassion. Please call if Compassion may give a presentation to your group. (503-525-1956)

Compassion asked to Participate in End-of-Life Study

A prominent researcher who has published studies in the New England Journal of Medicine and Journal of American Medical Association on the opinions of Oregon doctors and hospice workers regarding physician aid-in-dying, has approached Compassion to assist her in the next study. She has asked Compassion to provide confidential access to our clients and their family members to find out their opinions on why they believe in having the option to use physician aid-in-dying. The researcher is applying for a grant and if approved we will be given credit in the study for our participation. We will be able to publish her name and details if the grant is approved.

“ His suffering was minimal and he made his exit in a timely and dignified fashion as was his wish. I want to thank you for your help and guidance during all of this. Contact with you brought me massive comfort. I didn't feel alone nor worried that my brother would have to suffer horribly. I thank you from the bottom of my heart. I will never forget the help you gave to me and my family.”

Client and Families Are More Than Numbers

The above quote from the sister of a Compassion client is representative of the hundreds of comments we receive from family and friends. Without the involvement of our volunteers and generous support from our donors we could not provide the assistance and compassion we give to our clients. In 2002, Compassion received 3509 telephone calls, emails and letters, a 30% increase from 2001. These figures represent that Compassion continues to assist more than 75% of all those who choose to go through the physician aid-in-dying process. In addition, because of Compassion's work with the terminally ill, at least 17 clients in 2002 chose not to hasten their death by violent means. These numbers translate into comfort and relief for the dying. The words of appreciation from our clients and families however best tell our story. ***“Thank you for all of your hard work.”*** - Stephen ***“Thank you for your good work in this world.”*** - Carolyn ***“Thank you again for all your time and assistance with my mom. Your presence at the time of her death was particularly comforting to all of us.”*** - Suzie ***“I only wish the rest of the country could see the benefits of***

*your program and I hope Mr. Ashcroft stays out of your business.” - Alana
“We were in contact with your program; that fact alone brought tremendous comfort to my brother. It helped him to be unafraid because he felt he did have an escape.” - Marlena
“You were a tremendous help.” - Valerie
“I certainly appreciate that your contacts recommended Dr. — to me. I am very pleased to have him for my doctor.” - Margaret
“As I went through this process with my father, the benefits of your organization became distinctively clear.” - Anon.*

What's New at Compassion?

Advance Directive CD ROM Program

Creation of an advance directive CD-ROM is a service we offer to individuals who make a contribution of \$75 or more. The CD is 3" x 2.5" (the size of a credit card) and is easily kept in one's billfold or purse. Mail a copy of your completed and signed advance directive to Compassion together with \$75 or more and we will place your directive on a CD and send it to you along with your advance directive.

Three-Legged Mascot Joins Compassion

Compassion volunteer **Elizabeth Olsen's** pet dog **Cassie** has joined us in the office on a regular basis. Cassie lost her left front leg in an auto accident. She now provides pet therapy to many disabled humans throughout the Portland area. She has become our unofficial mascot, scooting in and out of offices giving each of us a good morning lick.

Compassion on Radio and TV

■ 2002 more than 150 media events and interviews included reference to Compassion or one or more of our clients. They ranged from small radio stations to national network television such as KXL & KPAM radio, OPB, KATU-TV, and NBC, CBS, ABC, FOX & CNN news. This type of exposure has been useful in educating the public and politicians. The Oregon v. Ashcroft lawsuit, in which Compassion clients are plaintiffs, has afforded us the opportunity to get our message out to literally millions of Americans via the media. Attorney General Ashcroft's attack on Oregon's law brought national media attention to our state. As a result more people learned about the law and that they could receive assistance and support from Compassion in Dying of Oregon in choosing among their end-of-life options. We estimate that the publicity resulted in a 15% increase in our calls and requests. I suppose in some way we should thank Ashcroft for attempting to impose his religious beliefs on Oregonians, but I simply can't go that far.

Compassion Clients In National Magazines

Compassion client **Colleen Rice**, who chose to take medication so she could die with dignity, was featured in the March/April 2003 issue of **AARP—The Magazine**. The article, entitled “**Colleen’s Choice**,” covers seven pages of AARP’s new combined magazine which has a readership of 24 million. The story is a poignant telling of Colleen’s life and how she gave strength to her family so that she may take the path of her choosing. The author also tells about Compassion’s ED, George Eighmey, being greeted by Colleen the day she chose to die and how he sensed a “softness in the air, a feeling of warmth.” He said “Colleen was such a warm, reassuring woman, she gave others permission to feel sad and to participate.” Colleen had one project she wanted to complete before her death. It was to publish the book she had been writing for several years. Colleen died peacefully on December 13, 2000 knowing her book, **In the Midst of Darkness**, a historical novel about an Irish family, was in print. **Scott Rice** has offered to give a copy of Colleen’s book to all donors who donate \$75 or more to Compassion in Dying of Oregon during the months of March, April & May, 2003. Please indicate on the donation envelope if you would like a copy.

Two other Compassion clients were highlighted in the February 2003 issue of “**O**” the **Oprah magazine**. The article, written by **Betty Rollin**, Compassion’s 2002 annual dinner keynote speaker, tells the story of **Margaret Sutherland**, who hastened her death in 2000. **Jean Gunning** is a current client who told her story of why she wants the option to decide how she will exit this world. Jean is a highly articulate and rational woman who simply wants the right to choose. Our legions of brave souls have pioneered a new era for the terminally ill. They have defined the term “**We have the Right to Die with Dignity and Grace.**”

Thank You Goes Out to All Our Donors

In 2002 Compassion donors generously donated **\$112,358**, which included donations from all Compassion board members and advisory board members. We received in-kind services valued in excess of **\$400,000** from our volunteers, services that included such jobs as stuffing envelopes to providing client support. Our volunteers contributed more than 7000 hours of their time last year. Compassion mailed 2 major fund raising letters to more than 3500 potential donors, contacted more than 12 potential major donors, sent out 2 newsletters, and held our fifth year anniversary dinner with 200 attending. Supporters of Compassion’s work have been tremendous. In response to a plea in our last newsletter **Ed King** donated \$1,000 so that we could purchase a new computer and 2 new monitors. Thank you Ed King.

A special thank you goes to our generous benefactor **Dr. George Whatley**, who informed us in 2002 that his annual gift will be \$25,000. Dr. Whatley’s

unfailing commitment has meant that we have been able to provide our end-of-life services to hundreds of terminally ill Oregonians. Dr. Whatley is an inaugural member **of** our Honored Donors Club.

There are many more donors who have earned our heartfelt thanks, but we have limited space within which to name them all. **Julie McMurchie** is a donor who must be mentioned. Julie passionately tells her mother's story to thousands via public engagements and national media. Julie's mother died peacefully after taking medication prescribed under Oregon's law. Julie recalls that time as "***a moment of healing after a year of pain, discomfort, and misery.***" **Christine Farrington** is another of our special donors. She has volunteered for five years with Compassion, donated thousands of dollars, and brings her rich and varied experience to our board. One more special donor is **Barbara Roberts** who offered her book ***Death Without Denial - Grief Without Apology*** to us at a discount so that we could offer it to you. Barbara will autograph her book for those who contribute \$75 or more to Compassion.