

Compassion in Dying Of Oregon Newsletter

Issue Number 1

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Patient Services

COMPASSION IN DYING of Oregon continues to provide counseling, information and support to terminally ill Oregonians on all end-of-life options, including the option of a hastened death for those who qualify under Oregon's Death with Dignity Act. In our first six months of service, we have provided over 50 individuals and their families with support, information, referrals and counseling, to varying degrees. In addition, we have responded to over 200 requests for general information and referral. We have come to realize that in many cases, those who seek our help are in desperate situations.

Regrettably, although Oregonians made their support of self-determination in end-of-life healthcare decisions resoundingly clear, information, education and decision support that may include a physician-aided death is not freely available to Oregonians.

COMPASSION IN DYING of Oregon may be the only easily accessible source of nonjudgmental information and support for all end-of-life options.

Our network of professionals, which includes hospice nurses, social workers, case managers and other healthcare workers, has become a reality in the Portland metro area. The ways in which COMPASSION has helped individuals and families ranges from finding better palliative care, to providing physicians with information about the Oregon Death with Dignity Act, to providing family members with much needed in-home hospice, to helping patients with referrals to physicians who will honor their requests for aid-in-dying, if their current physician has declined their request.

We are working on establishing a presence throughout Oregon, especially in those parts of the state where access to services and information may be limited. Communities throughout the state have been researched and profiled by our staff, in order to assess their differing needs and do our best to meet them. Our statewide network of professionals is coming together slowly, and in the meantime our staff, and a handful of exceptional volunteers are doing a terrific job of meeting the needs of those individuals who seek our services outside of the Portland metro area. If anyone you know may have an interest in supporting us through volunteering-as a patient advocate, case manager, or in any other way in which they are motivated to contribute their talents to our work, please encourage them to get in touch with us.

Legal

One challenge follows another. As soon as Janet Reno announced that current law does not allow the federal Drug Enforcement Administration to revoke a doctor's prescribing authority because he or she provided a prescription under the Oregon Death with Dignity Act, Senator Nickles of Oklahoma and Congressman Hyde of Illinois launched a Congressional attack on the law passed by the people of Oregon. Congress has scheduled a July 14th hearing on a bill that would place physicians at risk of prosecution for prescribing life-ending medication.

These distant legislators never participated in the responsible and deliberative process undertaken by the people of Oregon over the past four years. But they wish to overturn the judgment of Oregonians with new federal legislation. According to Barbara Coombs Lee, chief petitioner of Oregon's Death with Dignity Act and Executive Director of COMPASSION IN DYING Federation of America, "We've seen tremendous advances in the care of the dying because of the law we passed here in Oregon. And now, because of their moral opposition to the law Oregonians passed, a few members of Congress want to take our right to vote away", said Lee. "And that means every advance in end-of-life care--from increases in the use of pain medication to a huge upsurge in hospice referrals--is once again at risk in the halls of Congress".

COMPASSION IN DYING, together with the American Medical Association and the Oregon Hospice Association, continue their efforts to fight Congress, and protect individual choice at the end-of-life. COMPASSION IN DYING of Oregon continues to pursue careful implementation of Oregon's new law and assist patients and their families to include this option among others at the end of life.

Administration

Operations

We have settled nicely into our office here in Portland, which we share with the national organization, COMPASSION IN DYING Federation of America. The staff at COMPASSION, along with our Medical Director, Dr. Peter Goodwin, have developed and revised patient forms and other materials for distribution, based upon our experiences with the public. Using our Access computer program, we have developed a database which records patient information; that can be compiled and used to further research improvements in end-of-life care. We have also created several other Access databases which track funder history and information inquiries, as well as a database of resources throughout the state.

Financial

COMPASSION IN DYING of Oregon is in a very tight spot financially. As you know, we are a non-profit organization which provides all services to patients and families free of charge. We are extremely low on funds at this time, and continue to exist on a month-by-month basis. It is critical that we receive the funds needed to continue to provide our

services to patients, as well as to ensure that the Oregon Death with Dignity Act is implemented in a responsible manner.

We are asking friends and supporters of the right to die with dignity and of COMPASSION IN DYING of Oregon, to consider sponsoring a coffee for a circle of friends who they believe share their convictions. We have created a short video, which would act as a good introduction to the subject. We would be happy to attend the coffee and bring this video, as well as other information that we believe is of value to everyone, regardless of his or her personal health status. If it is not feasible or does not resonate with you to introduce us to a discussion group of your friends and associates, please tell them about us and ask that they consider us in their plans for financial giving.

Summary

We hope this letter was informative to you, and encourage you to contact us with any questions which remain unanswered. We have come a long way in the six months since we began, and continue to look towards the future. There is much work which remains to be done on behalf of terminally ill Oregonians, and COMPASSION IN DYING of Oregon will continue to provide individuals with information and support on all end-of-life options.