



MEDIA RELEASE

Coroner misses the point on 'self-administered euthanasia'

Referring to the comments by SA coroner Mark Johns that "desperately sad" deaths by the elderly using 'self-administered euthanasia' were characterised by "isolation, loneliness and solitude", Exit International Founder Dr Philip Nitschke said that this was rarely the case, and that this was a phenomena was set to increase.

Dr Nitschke said that a growing group of elderly Australians were actively seeking the means by which they could electively end their lives, and many were taking up this option of rational self-administered euthanasia, not because of isolation and sadness, but because to many this was preferable to loosing independence and moving into support accommodation.

Referring the situation of Rob Brown, 94, who ended his life electively, as his macular degeneration progressed, Dr Nitschke said Rob was well organised, and prepared for the day. He had been a life member of Exit International and obtained the means to end his life back in 2011, and made it clear that he was not going into care, but had since reached the point where there was no other option.

Dr Nitschke also pointed out that the passage of euthanasia legislation in Australia, would have had no impact on Mr Brown's plans. Macular Degeneration is a cause of blindness, but is not a terminal illness. If Brownie had come to Darwin in 1996, when the NT euthanasia law was functioning, he would have been told to go away, and return if he had terminal cancer!

Even the issue of loneliness didn't apply. Robbie had a strong social network. He was aware though, that the law is vague when it comes to being present with someone when they take that lawful step to suicide, and he had watched with alarm as the SA Police harassed the family of cancer sufferer Max Bromson, when they openly admitted being present when Max took the lethal drugs in a Glenelg motel.

"The police actions have scared the elderly. Many have close friends and loved ones with them, when they suicide, but now, no one admit this, or they choose to use one of the undetectable suicide methods using gases like nitrogen."

Despite increased efforts by Federal police and border security, Exit estimates that in 2014 well over 100 elderly Australians successfully imported the premier euthanasia drug Nembutal. A bigger number had ordered and received Nitrogen cylinders to keep on hand - just in case. In 2014 Exit was aware of over 20 elderly elective deaths, many, like Brownie, deliberately seeking the media's attention by leaving a public note left. This number is just the tip of the iceberg.

Dr Nitschke said deaths, like Brownies, we're not reasons for desperate sadness, as suggested by Coroner Johns, but rather a reason to be pleased that Brownie had been able to maintain control, ending his life at the time that best suited him. His death adds to the growing number of elderly suicides, but rather than a cause of alarm, these are suicide statistics that our society should be proud of.

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