

# Letters to the Editor

## Rights of Terminally Ill Act.

In June 1995, the Northern Territory Legislative Assembly passed the *Rights of the Terminally Ill Act*, the first of its kind in the world. This Act has been assented to by the Administrator but is yet to be given a commencement date.

Under section 7 of the Act, certain matters must be "prescribed" in regulations before the Act can commence. The relevant parts of section 7 are:

"(2) In assisting a patient under this Act a medical practitioner shall by appropriate medical standards and such guidelines, if any, as are prescribed, and shall consider the appropriate pharmaceutical information about any substance reasonably available for use in the circumstances

(3) Where a patient's medical practitioner has no special qualifications in the field of palliative care, the information to be provided to the patient on the availability of palliative care shall be given by a medical practitioner...who has such special qualifications in the field of palliative

care as are prescribed.

(4) A medical practitioner shall not assist a patient under this Act where the medical practitioner or any other medical practitioner who is required under subsection (1) or (3) to communicate with the patient does not share the same first language as the patient, unless there is present at the time of that communication and at the time the certificate is signed by or on behalf of the patient, an interpreter who holds a level 3 accreditation from the National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters, or such other interpretive qualifications as are prescribed, in the first language of the patient"

I advise that the Territory Health Services and the Attorney-General's Department has set up an interdepartmental working party to oversee the implementation of the Act.

A particular function of the working party is to collect information to assist in the drafting of regulations

and guidelines referred to in the above provisions. In summary, this requires the collection of information about:

- medical standards;
- medical protocols;
- pharmaceutical information;
- interpreting services in the NT;
- palliative care providers.

The Government is concerned to ensure that there is wide community consultation before the implementation phase of the Act. The address for comment is :

Working Party on the Rights of the Terminally Ill Act.

NT Attorney General's Department  
GPO Box 1722  
Darwin NT 0801

Helen Findlay  
NT Attorney General's Department

## Fighting Alcohol

As co-ordinator for the Salvation Army Bridge program, I have been present at the Magistrates Court for the past four months on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, giving information on options for recovery for clients with alcohol and drug addiction problems.

The Bridge program is a treatment focusing on complete abstinence to help men and women who want to stop drinking due to organ damage, lack of control or any other reason. The twelve week program includes group work based on the twelve steps of *Alcoholics Anonymous*. The course includes sessions on stress and anger management, life values and self esteem and communication skills. The cost of The Bridge program is approximately 60% of sickness benefit per fortnight.

I hope this information will be useful in referring clients with addiction problems to appropriate agencies. For more information, I can be contacted at court or on 812500 during business hours.

Ross Webster  
Program Co-ordinator

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