

Death With Dignity – What You Can Do

by Ed Gogol

Introduction

We need legal and cultural change:

Legal change to allow an ill person, suffering intolerably and irremediably, to choose to hasten their death – to have the legal right to obtain the means to a peaceful, dignified, humane and pain-free death. And to allow that person's doctors and loved ones to assist them, without fear of prosecution for "assisting in a suicide."

Cultural change – to recognize that it is okay for a suffering person to choose to hasten their death, and to recognize that it can be the height of compassion for a doctor or loved one to assist someone to die in this manner.

To bring this change about, in Illinois and around the US, we need a large and powerful social movement. Here's a list of things that individuals can do to plug into this movement, to make it larger and more effective.

Join Final Options Illinois

We are the local outpost of the movement, and we are working for legal change right here in Illinois. Your dues and contributions make possible our work. And the more members we have, the more we create momentum for our cause.

Join at least one of the three major national groups – Compassion & Choices, Death With Dignity National Center, and Final Exit Network

We are fortunate to have three wonderful national groups that work to advance the cause of death with dignity. **Compassion & Choices** ("C&C") is the largest and best funded, with campaigns going on in many states. The **Death With Dignity National Center** works for legal change in many states. And **Final Exit Network** ("FEN") serves suffering people all across the country, providing information, counseling and support.

All three groups are well worth your support. At a minimum, we recommend signing up for their free email lists. You can find them on the web at www.compassionandchoices.org, www.deathwithdignity.org, and www.finalexitnetwork.org.

Sign up for Derek Humphry's "ERGO" listserve (www.finalexit.org)

Derek Humphry, the founder of our movement, provides a free email list, offering news from the death with dignity movement from around the world. This is the single best way of staying on top of what's happening everywhere. And you'll quickly learn that our movement is truly worldwide.

Come to our events

As we work to educate the public, we sponsor educational events – conferences, talks, meetings, film showings, etc. Come on out, even if you've heard it before. Big crowds at our events demonstrate public support.

Educate yourself

Join the groups, come to our events, read ... and pretty soon you'll be quite knowledgeable about our cause.

Reach out to your friends and your loved ones

Talk to your friends and loved ones about our cause. Choose your opportunity to raise the subject. You'll find a surprisingly large number are already supportive and knowledgeable. (Lots of people have nursed loved ones through bad deaths.) Others will be "potentially interested or supportive" – they would support us once they understand the cause.

For supporters, encourage them to join. Ask them if it's okay if you send their contact information on to us, to be added to our email and/or mailing list. If they say yes, do so. For people who are hesitant, ask them to contact us directly, to provide their email address. Tell them they can always unsubscribe from our email list at any time. **This is really important. Your recruiting efforts are one of the best ways that our movement can grow.**

When you encounter an opponent, be polite and engage them. Inquire about their beliefs, and respond to their concerns. Some people are open to reason. For others, ask them to respect your right to make a different choice.

Remember that many people will be opposed to our cause at first, or hesitant to support us, just because they have misconceptions or don't understand what it is about. Every single conversation you have on the subject is an opportunity to educate. Again, always be courteous. Our opponent today may become our supporter tomorrow.

Reach out to your doctors and nurses

Physicians are an especially important constituency for us to recruit, for many reasons. If you can, talk about the cause with your doctors. Say something like, “Doctor, if I ever have a horrible illness, and I’m suffering, I would like to have the choice to hasten my death. Like people do in Oregon. I hope this is something you would support.”

If your doctor reacts positively, great! Ask if you can add them to our Hemlock of Illinois email and/or mailing list, and if so forward their info on to us. Don’t be disappointed if your doctor is noncommittal or opposed.

And don’t forget your nurses, your medical social workers, etc. Everybody who works in health care is important.

Lay in a supply of our literature

You’ll need this to provide to your friends, loved ones and doctors as you reach out to them. Call to talk about what’s available.

Organize an event

There are many groups that you may be a part of. Organize an event, a speaker or a film showing. Host a house party. We can provide expert and engaging speakers. A showing of the film “How To Die in Oregon” is a wonderful way to let people know what the cause is about.

For a talk, an hour is plenty, leaving plenty of time for questions and discussion, and the subject can be handled in a lot less time if that’s all you have.

Organizing events is particularly important, because we need to reach out to a lot of people, all over the state. **Always use these as opportunities to identify and sign up supporters.**

Choose your own constituency for outreach

If you have a specific constituency you would like to help us to reach, let us know. Social workers, nurses, teachers, pastors, etc. all need education and outreach.

Write your own story

Many people who support death with dignity have personal stories to tell. They may have witnessed bad deaths, or they may have nursed loved ones through bad deaths. Or they may have illnesses and want options for themselves. Whatever your specific circumstances, it's worth writing them, to explain what brought you to support the cause. **Personal stories make the issue real.** We need to publish these stories, on our website and in our newsletter.

Become a public advocate for the cause

If you've educated yourself, and have been reaching out to your friends and loved ones, you're halfway there. We need people who are willing to be public advocates for the cause, to give talks, to speak out, to write letters to the editor. Public speaking isn't that hard, it just takes practice.

Help reach out to legislators

We need people to join our legislative task force. To reach out to their legislators, to educate them on the issue, to engage with them and enlist their support. A personal letter, a personal visit from a constituent, works wonders.

Help out with marketing, with the newsletter, with the website, with social media, with fundraising

If you have specific skills and can help with marketing, with writing, with media, with our website and social media, and/or with fundraising, you may be able to help in very specific and valuable ways. Are you a lawyer? An accountant? A web guru? Are you in marketing or advertising? Fundraising? Let us know what you are willing to do!

Write that check!

I'm repeating myself, but again, your membership dues, your contributions, are the fuel for our movement. We know how valuable your contributions are, and we pledge to use them efficiently and carefully.

Have fun!

Movements for social change can be wonderful things, bringing together committed, aware and involved people working for the betterment of all humanity. What could be more fun?