(Nearly) Painless Ways to Support EOLWA

End of Life Washington depends on individual donations for more than 85% of its funding. We appreciate every dollar that comes from the supporters of this critical work. Here are a couple ways that you could help the organization in its important mission and at the same time maximize the amount of your donation.

Strategy 1: Donate some of your appreciated stock to End of Life Washington – make a larger gift and take a larger deduction.

Recently, the stock market has risen to an all-time high. If you own stock that has increased in value and you’ve owned it for over one year, you can avoid paying the capital gains tax by donating the security to End of Life Washington. At the time of the donation, you get a tax deduction equal to the fair market value of the stock (not just your cost basis).

Example: You bought XYZ stock two years ago for $10 a share, and it’s now worth $40 a share. If you donate 100 shares of the stock to EOLWA ($4,000), you will get a tax deduction of $4,000.

If you sold that same stock and donate the proceeds to EOLWA, you would pay the federal long-term capital gains tax of 20% or $800 on a profit of $3,000 and EOLWA would receive only $3,200.

Strategy 2: Use the Qualified Charitable Distribution (QCD) law when planning your IRA withdrawal.

In 2015, Congress passed a law allowing taxpayers over 70 1/2 years old to give up to $100,000 to a charity directly from their individual retirement account (IRA) without counting the distribution as taxable income. A QCD is a direct transfer of funds from your IRA custodian to a qualified charity. In addition to the benefits of giving to charity, a QCD excludes the donation from taxable income.

Example: It’s 2017, you are over 70 1/2, you need to take your Required Minimum Distribution (RMD) from your IRA, which you’ve been funding your entire working life, you are already in the 25% federal tax bracket, and you really don’t need the money. What to do?

Make a $5,000 gift to End of Life Washington, using the QCD strategy. EOLWA receives the full $5,000 and you avoid paying $1,250 in federal taxes. A win – win situation!

To discuss and/or utilize these gifting strategies to support the mission of making sure every Washington State resident knows about and has access to Death with Dignity, please contact Kathy Sparkman, Development Director at EOLWA. Direct phone 206-274-9974 or email ks@endolifewa.org. Or feel free to send Kathy a note on the remittance envelope enclosed in this newsletter, and she will get in touch right away.

Annual Meeting
IN ITS ...

Learn about the latest initiatives and important work of Washington’s premiere end-of-life organization

WHERE:
Japanese Baptist Church
160 Broadway, Seattle
Limited Parking
Public transit recommended

WHEN:
Saturday, October 7
Hospitality Time 1 p.m.
Presentations 1:30-3 p.m.

PROGRAM
Keynote speaker Dr. Hope Wechkin

"Wishing: Entanglement in Medicine and Everyday Life"
(While not a typo, come find out why)

Hope Wechkin, MD has been the medical director of EvergreenHealth’s Hospice and Palliative Care programs since 2007. A graduate of Yale University and the University of Washington School of Medicine, Dr. Wechkin is a frequent guest speaker on clinical, ethical, and programmatic aspects of providing care to patients with serious illness. Dr. Wechkin describes her palliative care specialty as “jumping off the medical train, in terminal cases such as end-stage dementia, cardiac disease and cancer. We evaluate on an individual basis what makes sense for each patient. Instead of telling the body what to do, in terms of routinely ordering tests and procedures and treatment, we let the body tell us.”
New Board Chair Has End of Life Experience in Wash. and Calif.

By Jordan Posamentier, Esq.

As the new Board President of End of Life Washington, I have had the rare privilege to serve our end-of-life cause in two states: first California and now Washington. In California, I served on the board of Compassion & Choices California for several years, eventually becoming its president. I helped lead legislative campaigns on a patient’s right to know the full range of end-of-life options, education initiatives around advance directives and planning, and volunteer services to support Californians with terminal illnesses who were seeking more information and resources on how to die on their own terms.

I’m proud to say that these efforts paved the way for the eventual passage of California’s End of Life Option Act.

Then my family and I moved to Washington, and I joined End of Life Washington’s board. I got to see what life (and death) were like in a state that had already been using its Death with Dignity Act for a number of years.

While the fear of prosecution for participating in Death with Dignity seems diminished here, the stigma remains. Many, if not most, Washingtonians still lack awareness of their end-of-life options. Access to the best medicines remains limited. Finally, the number of providers and pharmacists willing to respect Washingtonians’ lawful medical preferences remains far too low.

We have so much work to do! As the new President of the Board, I am honored to help advance End of Life Washington’s mission – to uphold everyone’s right to the full range of end-of-life choices, including Death with Dignity.

We are committed to advocacy, education, and support in order to achieve our vision: a world where people understand their end-of-life choices and can die on their own terms, without barriers.

I look forward to working with you and for you, as we strive to ensure that our last days are the best we can make them and that we are able to meet our deaths according to our wishes.

Executive Director’s Message

Death and Dying Makes for An Enlightening Read

One of my favorite things to do when I get home from working all day at End of Life Washington is to sit in my reading chair with a good book. More often than not, that good book has something to do with death and dying, as strange as that might seem.

Lately books about dying have become all the rage, with several topping the best sellers’ list. Dr. Atul Gawande’s Being Mortal: Medicine and What Matters in the End was the book club choice of 2016. It’s the title most often mentioned by attendees at my End of Life Choices presentations. Fast on its heels is the heartrending memoir When Breath Becomes Air by the brilliantly lyrical young neurosurgeon Paul Kalanithi, who takes the reader on his journey into death from lung cancer. In fact, Amazon cites these two books as “Frequently Bought Together.”

I have several more titles to add to the list, books that have helped me to better grasp the complexities facing medical providers striving to meet the needs of patients who want and deserve more than the medicalization of their deaths. One book I highly recommend is Dr. Jessica Nuñez Zitter’s Extreme Measures: Finding a Better Path to Life.

By Nancy Sapiro, Esq., EOLWA Lobbyist

Most Recent Attempt to Weaken Death with Dignity Law Scuttled in Legislature

With the passage of Initiative 1000 in 2008, Washington took an important and humane step in improving care for terminally ill adults – providing Washington citizens with the right of choice at the end of their lives. While passage of the law ensures that any patient who meets the criteria can request Death with Dignity (DWD), systemic barriers often make the law difficult to access. In the 8 years since implementation, patients continue to experience significant challenges in accessing information, locating doctors who can assist, and in obtaining medications.

While we persist in our efforts to address these barriers, we are also confronted with legislative efforts to tamper with our state law. In 2015, and again in 2017, legislation was introduced which would have created additional and unnecessary requirements to be met before a patient could access DWD. This legislation, known as SB 5433, proposed amending the law to add a requirement that attending physicians inform eligible DWD patients of feasible alternatives for the purpose of cure and for the purpose of extending the patient’s life.

Advocates for this change, however, failed to acknowledge that people seeking to use DWD have already had deep conversations about relevant treatment options and have either exhausted all possible treatments or have chosen to forego further treatment.

Senate Bill 5433 passed out of committee and ultimately passed out of the Senate on a 26-23 vote. SB 5433 then moved to the House where it died in the Health Care Committee. SB 5433 remains alive and could be taken up again during the 2018 session, which begins in January.

While it is concerning that the bill advanced as far as it did, the good news from this past session is two-fold: first, the bill was not favorably received by the House Health Care Committee and thus did not receive a hearing; and second, although the bill did pass out of the Senate, the margin by which it passed shrunk from two years ago.

Much of this is attributable to the good work done this session by End of Life Washington’s Executive Director, Sally McLaughlin, and others. We spent significant time talking to legislators about why changes to the law are unnecessary, given that physicians who qualify people for DWD are already mandated to discuss all feasible alternatives. We also emphasized that terminally ill patients have already been told their conditions are terminal and that requiring another conversation fails to acknowledge the heart-wrenching decisions these individuals have already made.

Should the legislation come up for debate in 2018, we will again urge legislators to respect the will of the voters and leave the law unchanged. If you would like to help us in our advocacy efforts, please contact End of Life Washington, and we will find a way for you to get involved!

We persist in our efforts to address these barriers.”

— Nancy Sapiro

Dr. Zitter, a unique combination of ICU doctor and Palliative Care Specialist, actively grapples with the inadvertent, unintended, yet brutally real harm that can be done when doctors treat diseases rather than patients. She became a staunch advocate of “the conversation” after her terminal patients often opted out of treatments she’d assumed they would want. As she puts it, “I learned to step back from my ‘do everything’ instinct and pause. I worked to tease out the most important requirements and then honor them, which sometimes meant avoiding treatments that once were so reflexive. I came to see that in our zeal to save life, we often worsened death.” Dr. Zitter’s short ER-based documentary in Extremis, is a staple at our EOLWA Advance Planning Seminars.

Another recent publication I recommend is Duke University cardiology fellow Dr. Haider Warraich’s Modern Death: How Medicine Changed the End of Life. As reviewer Ellen Goodman aptly noted, “It’s a wonderful combination of history, anatomy, public policy, and storytelling.” We at End of Life Washington spend so much energy encouraging doctors to support patient choice that I felt something akin to a vicarious victory when Dr. Warraich concluded, “In the course of writing this book, I have learned many things about myself. Most surprising is to realize that, knowing what I know now, I have come to the conclusion that we must do more to discuss and support competent terminology. It’s patients’ right to demand and acquire the means to end their suffering with the aid of a physician.”

I am heartened by the deep thought and careful consideration that physicians such as Dr. Zitter, Dr. Warraich and Dr. Epstein express in their books. They mirror the care and commitment I witness in my dealings with Washington State doctors who support their patients’ autonomy and right to choose at end of life. Washington residents are fortunate to have access to Death with Dignity and, even more, to have tangible support from physicians who have grappled with the considerations highlighted in the books I recommend and have chosen to help their patients meet death on their own terms.