A Word from the Executive Director

Busy statewide agenda focuses on training both in-house and real-world

Our work at End of Life Washington (EOLWA) keeps us busy as we strive to assure access to choice at end of life throughout Washington State. In the past year, sixteen EOLWA speakers have orchestrated 119 presentations on End of Life Choice and Advance Planning in 37 locations from Anacortes to Walla Walla and everywhere in between.

We continue our important work in Olympia where EOLWA lobbyist, Nancy Sapirio, JD, a self-proclaimed “mischief manager,” works to monitor micro-as well as macro-agressions against the Death with Dignity Law. At the end of January, board member and Volunteer Client Adviser (VCA), Arline Hinckley, and I testified in favor of Senate Bill 6247, “Concerning limitations on health care provider services imposed by health care entities,” which would allow for civil prosecution of health care entities who “obsfuscate” in an attempt to withhold information about Death with Dignity (DWD).

Working in conjunction with Jilliene MacCreery, our Client Support Director, we have instigated several exciting new programs. We’re in the process of launching our “Provider’s Network,” a “by invitation only” online site where physicians, psychologists, pharmacists, social workers, and EOLWA-affiliated volunteers can access current information and resources, as well as identify colleagues who work with DWD patients. This social media network will allow members to gather in a digital space to discuss issues, ask questions, and share experiences. We have written and recorded an online training for new VCAs to complement our in-person training and mentor program.

EOLWA earns national reputation for advance planning

By Robb Miller, Board Member and former Executive Director

Would it surprise you to learn that a small, Washington State-based nonprofit organization like End of Life Washington (EOLWA) is a national leader in advance planning? For nearly 20 years, we have created and distributed groundbreaking advance planning documents and made them available to the public at no charge.

One of these, the Health Care Decision IQ Test, is a quick, one-page quiz that provides a simple, effective way to help you determine how well your family, doctor, or health care agent understand your wishes for medical treatment when you can’t speak for yourself.

Three of the most important advance planning documents we created are the EOLWA Advance Directive, the Alzheimer’s Disease/Dementia Mental Health Advance Directive and our most recently published document, My Instructions for Oral Feeding and Drinking.

After several years of committed research and development, in 2005 we released our EOLWA Advance Directive, which combines a Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care and a Living Will into a single document. Unlike some other advance directives available in Washington, it doesn’t include any statements based on religious doctrine, applies to both terminal and nonterminal conditions and includes multiple provisions that address dementia and Alzheimer’s. It has been widely used, promoted, and praised by estate planning and elder law attorneys, advance planning advocates and health care professionals who appreciate its clear, specific language documenting when you do and don’t want life-sustaining treatment.

In 2012 we collaborated with Seattle University Elder Law Professor, Lisa Brott, to create a first-of-its-kind Alzheimer’s Disease/Dementia Mental Health Advance Directive. This document enables people coping with Alzheimer’s disease and dementia to document their nonmedical wishes about the inevitable and difficult challenges related to living with these illnesses. These include what to do when they can no longer live at home, who will provide the care they need, and how to finance it, where they want to live, and when to stop driving. In 2013 the Western and Central Washington State Chapter of the Alzheimer’s Association endorsed this directive and provided it to everyone who attended their annual conference.

Our most recent directive, My Instructions for Oral Feeding and Drinking, broke entirely new ground and garnered national attention when we published it late last year. It empowers you (and the person you choose to make decisions for you later on) to stop having food and drink offered to you during advanced dementia when you can no longer feed yourself and lose the desire to eat or drink. In the absence of this new document, long-term facilities, caregivers, and even family members may feel compelled to continue providing food and water, which often prolongs the natural dying process. It’s important to understand that this document does not apply to people with dementia who still get hungry and thirsty and want to eat and drink.

All of these documents and many more are available at no charge and can be downloaded from our website, www.endoflifeWA.org, or mailed to you. For more information about our advance planning documents or to request that a document be mailed to you, contact us at (206) 256-1636 or info@endoflifeWA.org.

We are also crafting a “continuing education” online training for our current VCAs to make sure that they are up-to-speed with new initiatives and policy decisions. As we seek to establish regional teams, we have traveled the state (Spokane, Vancouver, Methow Valley, Mount Vernon, Kitsap Peninsula) to meet with prescribing physicians and VCAs in an effort to build relationships and cement allegiance to EOLWA’s mission of serving the entire state. These groups then form local teams who support each other as they serve our DWD clients in their areas. All this is in addition to our daily support for and interactions with the many clients who call End of Life Washington and avail themselves of our services, as we steward the Death with Dignity Act in Washington State.

End of Life Washington has benefitted from quite a bit of media coverage of our various initiatives and activities. In the past year we participated in Spokane Public Radio’s public forum on suicide, published several letters to the editor and opinion pieces in the Seattle Times, and have been mentioned or cited in nine news articles featured in seven different publications. Our latest advance planning document, My Instructions for Oral Feeding and Drinking, was thoroughly discussed in a Kaiser Health News panel discussion, broadcast through a Facebook webinar. And we’re looking forward to the publication of a three-part series on End of Life Washington and Death with Dignity in the “3 Act Magazine.”

These many efforts focus on our primary goal, best explained by our End of Life Washington Vision Statement: We envision a world where people understand their end-of-life choices and can die on their own terms, without barriers.
Skilled End of Life Washington staff is focused on a single mission of helping clients as they face difficult decisions

Our End of Life Washington office is staffed by four singularly skilled people with a diverse set of professional as well as life experiences.

Lindsay Soyer joined EOLWA as our Office Manager in November of 2010 and is the Jacqueline-of-all-trades who keeps all systems humming. She grew up in Montana and earned her master’s degree in Ecopsychology, with a special interest in “environmental philosophy,” which she describes as “the way people think about nature and their place in it.” These studies contributed to her abiding interest in the green burial movement and led her to work with a local alternative funeral service as a licensed funeral director, specializing in home funerals, green burial, and other family-centered and sustainable death care options. She also served as a board member of the national Green Burial Council. Lindsay has worked with nonprofits in various capacities since 2002, primarily social service, civic, and environmental organizations. It’s Lindsay’s friendly voice that you’ll first encounter when you call our office as she expertly triages requests, queries and questions and completes client intakes.

On August 1st of 2017 End of Life Washington welcomed Jilliene MacCreary as our new Director of Client Services. Jilliene hails from Battle Creek, Michigan where her parents managed the “Memorial Park Cemetery,” voted the most beautiful cemetery in the state. Their house was located on the grounds which afforded Jilliene and her siblings the “biggest backyard in the whole city!” Jilliene became interested in Death with Dignity after losing her mother to pancreatic cancer in a state where end of life choices were not offered. Passionate about meaningful final moments, she first served EOLWA as a Volunteer Client Adviser, which put her in good stead when she took on the directorship. Jilliene is a former leader in Federal Government with expertise in the areas of strategy, advocacy, and international engagement. Her skills support a long success story of working with other nations to achieve complex and wide-reaching goals. Jilliene has a passion for meaningful engagement, strong commitment to collaborative and innovative problem solving, and a desire to positively impact the lives of others.

Kathy Sparkman became End of Life Washington’s Development Director on March 1, 2016. She grew up in South Carolina and spent the first twenty-five years of her career as a financial advisor with Merrill Lynch, Bank of America, and Fidelity, several of the biggest financial institutions in the country. Working with Fidelity’s Charitable Services Group, Kathy assisted high net-worth donors as they planned their charitable giving, an experience which drew her to the non-profit realm, where she engaged in fund development at several Seattle-area non-profits before joining the EOLWA team. An experienced fundraiser with a track record of cultivating major gifts, Kathy is skilled in planned giving identification and cultivation. Kathy is intimately involved in the care of her mother, who is declining from dementia. Over the years, it really made Kathy think about the quality of life we all desire at the end of our lives. Kathy works hard for EOLWA as she educates, advocates, and solicits support for improving care and expanding choice at the end of life.

Sally McLaughlin, who joined the staff in February 2015 as End of Life Washington’s first Community Education Director, was promoted to Internim Executive Director in December 2015, and Executive Director in March 2016. She has developed and implemented End of Life Washington’s Advance Planning Seminars across the state and has presented on end-of-life choices and Washington State’s Death with Dignity law to physicians, nurses, social workers, clergy, hospices, retirement communities, service organizations, and many others. Sally graduated from the University of Washington with a master’s degree in Comparative Literature and additional degrees in French and German, as well as postgraduate work in education at Seattle University. As an educator and administrator in Seattle independent schools for over forty years, Sally came to End of Life Washington after serving as Dean of Faculty for Seattle Girls’ School. She has trained as a hospice volunteer as well as an EOLWA Volunteer Client Adviser and speaker. Sally is fond of saying that “if we at End of Life Washington do our job right and well, the day will come when we no longer have a job.” Sally is working diligently with Washington State hospices to increase collaboration and encourage their active participation with patients who choose Death with Dignity.

Support End of Life Washington
Your donations are still tax deductible!

- Protect our Death with Dignity Law
- Ensure that every Washington resident has access to the law
- Continue our coverage across the entire state
- Help us stay financially stable

How to give in the Merry Money Month of May:
- Go online to www.endoflifewa.org and click DONATE to make your one-time or recurring gift
- Call our office, 206-256-1636, for a recurring or one-time gift via credit card or checking account
- Send a check to End of Life Washington, P.O. Box 61369, Seattle, WA 98141 (envelope enclosed)
- Make an appreciated stock gift or a Qualified Charitable Distribution from your IRA. Call Kathy Sparkman, Development Director, 206-274-9974
- Give through Seattle Foundation’s GiveBIG on May 9 – online gifts only (www.givebigseattle.org)

Remarkable array of unique personalities crisscross the state for EOLWA

Those who choose to volunteer with End of Life Washington are an interesting bunch! With over 45 Volunteer Client Advisers (VCAs) throughout the state, we welcome a wide array of personalities with an equally wide array of life experience. Gretchen DeRoche, our longest-serving volunteer, and Hollis Giammatteo, our newest VCA, are two of our noteworthy characters.

Gretchen began her involvement with the Death with Dignity movement long before there was the law. She joined the Washington State organization Compassion in Dying as a volunteer after having worked with members of the AIDS community. Before the law, volunteers provided information, counsel, and support in obtaining medicine that would “give people choice.” As Gretchen put it, “We weren’t so concerned about risk; we were more focused on helping people.” In 2008 Gretchen collected over 2,500 signatures, putting Initiative 1000, Death with Dignity, on the ballot. She also worked to get clergy to support DWD, and as soon as she could, she volunteered as one of our organization’s very first VCAs.

Over the years, Gretchen has kept a list of all the deaths she’s supported, “because I never want to forget anyone. Each person was unique and special.” After thirty-one years of service to terminally ill people, Gretchen acknowledges that “some people wonder what’s wrong with me!” She’s quick to tell them that working with the dying is uniquely rewarding work. One experience in particular has stayed with Gretchen. She was privileged to support a couple who’d been together for 73 years. Both had qualified for Death with Dignity and died together in bed, holding hands.

When asked, “What keeps you ticking?” Gretchen returned, “I feel the need to continue to contribute…otherwise, why am I here?” She’s been blessed with good health, and though she turns 83 in April, Gretchen has no plans to retire. That’s excellent news for everyone who faces those most difficult end-of-life decisions.

Hollis Giammatteo joined EOLWA as a VCA in 2017 and experienced her first Death with Dignity, with her mentor Gretchen, on February 11, 2018. Hollis, a self-proclaimed seeker, became interested in working with the elderly after hearing our Executive Director, Sally McLaughlin, speak at Seattle Insight Meditation’s Death and Dying Group. “I’ve been hanging around the issue for a long time,” Hollis shared, having attended a life-changing conference in 1982 that featured Stephen Levine and Ram Dass. In 2001 Hollis began working with the elderly when she became a Certified Nursing Assistant. She envisioned that the elderly would “become her guide as she moved closer to experiencing dying,” but really taught her that often the elderly she encountered were not what she’d hoped. “They were not wise, and they had no answers!”

Over fifteen years ago Hollis embarked on a literary journey that culminated in the publishing of her memoir The Shelf Life of Ashes. She describes it as a “historic response to turning fifty” and in it, she shares her journey with her mother’s illness and death. Hollis deems death “a big transition, but no big deal.” She’s taken a fundamentally philosophical approach to her work which she claims “calls us to explore the self at an edge. What is the self, after all?” At almost seventy, Hollis recognizes that she is entering her “last phase…death and dying is the work to be done.” Hollis is working diligently with Washington State hospices to increase collaboration and encourage their active participation with patients who choose Death with Dignity.