



Newsletter

Spring 2023

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Guiding Clients to Find Solace at the End-of-Life

by EOLWA Staff

At 74 years old, Carl Shutoff has lost his fair share of loved ones. Ten years ago, before becoming a Volunteer Client Advisor (VCA) with End of Life Washington (EOLWA), Carl witnessed the death of his younger brother Harry. Harry had been sick for some time and had asked his doctors to keep him alive at all costs. Consequently, his doctors did not tell him he was terminal until ten days before he died. Carl does not believe his brother would have used the medical aid-in-dying law, but he does believe that had his doctors been more forthcoming sooner rather than later, he could have

made choices that would have spared him so difficult a death.

A few years ago, pre-pandemic veteran VCA Sally Thomae approached Carl to volunteer at EOLWA. She thought Carl would be a great addition to the EOLWA VCA team. Carl was surprised but said he would give it some thought. After reflecting on some books he had read about end-of-life issues (“How We Die” by Sherwin Nuland and “Being Mortal” by Atul Gawande), it occurred to Carl that Sally might see something in him he didn’t see.

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Achieving a Sustainable Future Together

by Teresa Chiftis, Current President of EOLWA Board of Directors

End of Life Washington Community Members:

Since I wrote to you in our last newsletter, a lot has happened – both from an organizational perspective and for the landscape of Washington’s Medical Aid in Dying (MAiD) law. It’s an exciting and challenging time on many levels.

In February, with former Executive Director Judy Kinney, moving into a new role at another non-profit, we welcomed Rebecca Lane as End of Life Washington’s Interim Executive Director. Rebecca brings tremendous experience, knowledge, passion, and compassion to her role. We couldn’t be more thrilled to have her on board as we begin our search for a permanent Executive Director.

A hiring committee with representation from staff, volunteers, and board members has been formed. While there are obvious baseline qualifications, the committee will also seek input from our community on the most important qualities for the next Executive Director to embody. A thoughtful and

thorough search process will take shape over the coming weeks. While a leadership change is challenging, it is also an opportunity to move forward aligned with our mission.

EOLWA will also start the next fiscal year with a new slate of board members. As a few of our current members’ terms of service will end at the end of June, we are actively recruiting new board members. Thanks to input from our community, we have some very compelling candidates that we have begun to engage with. This, too, is an opportunity to move forward aligned with our mission.

Speaking of our mission, EOLWA is proud to have accomplished so much in the past several months. Here are just a few of the highlights:

EOLWA hired Dr. Jess Kaan as Medical Director to help hone the talents of current volunteer providers and to reach out to potential new providers to encourage them to support the end-of-life choices of their patients.

EOLWA community members led, moderated, and participated in panel discussions at the National Clinicians Conference on Medical Aid in Dying (NCCMAID) in Portland.

EOLWA was the driving force behind the passage of SB 5179, to increase access to Washington’s Death with Dignity law and remove unnecessary barriers for terminally ill Washingtonians.

While these are wonderful accomplishments, I want everyone to remember that **none**, repeat, **none** of this happens without the dedication of our staff and volunteers across the state and the generosity of our donors. We’ve seen increasing demand for our services every year since I have been a part of EOLWA. Without our amazing team of staff and volunteers and the financial support of our donors, our clients would be left unsupported, and our mission would be unfulfilled. So please join me in a heartfelt **thank you** to all of the folks that make EOLWA the incredible organization that it is.



Same Mission Through Transition

by Rebecca Lane, Interim Executive Director

fundraising focus – did you know that our budget relies on 100% donor contributions? It’s a big lift every year to raise this, and our donors are integral to our success in serving a growing number of people in Washington state.

We’re also busy mapping out what’s next in client service provision, as the passage of SB 5179 is generating a significant increase in calls and requests for support. As our community knows, EOLWA stands alone, providing the education, support, and advocacy necessary to help Washington residents exercise their choice to die with dignity and autonomy.

Increasing our skills, knowledge, and capacity to serve all racial and cultural communities is integral

to growing our services. Known as DEIB - diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging – this commitment to creating organizational capacity that works for all who can benefit from our services is deep and ongoing professional development. I’m happy to answer whatever questions you may have about this work.

I’ve been familiar with EOLWA since the early days of working to pass I-119 and have admired the work immensely. As an elder myself, it’s an honor to support this organization getting to scale and fully funded capacity. I’m grateful for such dedicated and intelligent volunteers, staff, and board members working together to uphold our rights to the full range of end-of-life choices, including Death with Dignity, through advocacy, education, and support.

I’ve been in the nonprofit sector for over 35 years as a social worker, executive director, development and fundraising director, and now interim executive director. My role as Interim Executive Director is to guide an organization as they prepare for a leadership transition, support staff to keep services running, update any systems that need attention and assist the board in a search for new leadership.

At EOLWA, we’re improving our donor connections, development, and



Crossing the Legislative Finish Line

by Nancy Sapiro, JD, EOLWA Lobbyist

We are thrilled to report that Senate Bill 5179, which will increase access to our state's Death with Dignity Law (DWD), recently passed through both houses of the WA State Legislature and has now been signed into law by Governor Inslee. As you likely know from our alerts and newsletters, SB 5179 will improve access to our state's Death with Dignity law by shortening the waiting period from 15 days to 7 days, increasing the types of providers that can participate in DWD, and allowing prescriptions to be delivered by registered mail.

Getting to this point has been a several-year journey. It wouldn't have been possible without the support of everyone in the EOLWA community – from caregivers, patients, board members, community supporters, and staff. It was your willingness to reach out to legislators, to come to testify and share your stories and experiences, to talk with neighbors and friends about the importance of these policy changes, that enabled us to garner the support we needed to finally pass this legislation. And it also would not have been possible without our legislative champions, Senator Jamie Pedersen and Rep Skyler Rude. Thank you all! The legislation will become effective in late July of this year.

What does this mean for EOLWA and patients throughout the state? Well, first of all, we have lots of work to do – creating new internal procedures, educating pharmacists about the updates to the law, educating Advance Registered Nurse Practitioners (ARNPs) and Physician Assistants (PAs) about how they can become participating providers; and also making sure our current participating providers know about the changes to the law. But ultimately, we hope that it will mean fewer challenges and greater accessibility for people seeking to utilize our state's medical aid in dying law.

We know that 70% of people who come to EOLWA seeking access to medical aid-in-dying find themselves without a provider who can help them. We know that 27 of the 39 counties in this state don't have a compounding pharmacy to prepare or dispense medications. We also know that the 15-day waiting period can be an unbearably long period of needless suffering. So, it is our deep hope that these modest changes to the law will create more equitable access to care for people at the end of their lives. Because as part of the EOLWA community, we understand that dying well matters; our bodies and dignity matter. **Thank you for your support!**

Heartfelt Thanks to Our Volunteers!

She (the presenter) spoke with such confidence! Now, I have more confidence in having end-of-life discussions with patients and their families now that I know the options.

Thank you for helping Joe write the final chapter of his life. He was so brave and did it with such grace and dignity. The volunteer on Whidbey Island was able to join Joe's family and friends as Joe wrote the final ending. I am so glad Joe had this option.

Thank you for your kind and compassionate support.

It took longer than I had hoped, but I was finally able to fly. Thank you so much for all your help and advice.
- Becky

Mom died naturally—she was ready in part because of your counsel and just knowing she had options helped. Meeting you meant a great deal to mom and to me. I'll long remember your kindness. Mom was 98 years old, [and] in the end of her life, one person made a big difference. Thank you on behalf of all the family.
- Alison

Thank you for your continued work on DWD. Your assistance made my husband's passing easier. This donation is made in his memory.
- Cecelia

When working with clients and completing intakes over the phone, I have the honor and privilege to hear the deepest gratitude from our clients to our volunteers as they start the journey of DWD. One conversation stands out, "I know a word to describe these volunteers-angels. I don't know why they would help me, but they are." Seeing how volunteers care, respect and honor those wading through the hardest time of their life never ceases to amaze me. The dedication that is shown time and time again is appreciated every single day by EOLWA clients, and the communities in Washington and beyond. Thank you to our amazing volunteers.
- Rebe

I just wanted to pop you a note to say "Thank you" for caring for my father and being able to provide him with a death that was completely filled with his own decisions. Even though I was not there the day of, his death was exactly what he wanted: filled with love, music, and peace.

It is not easy to lose a parent, but it was as good of a death as possible. Thank you for being advocates for (as we would call in Canada), medical assistance in dying, and thank you for allowing people to be in control of their own health, even unto death.

- Amelia

Thank you for all the help and guidance you provided during a difficult time. I will always be grateful for the relief and peace you and EOL gave to my dear Bill. I miss him every day but am so relieved that he did not have to suffer needlessly.

We are writing to extend our deepest appreciation and gratitude for the support you provided our dad and us as he pursued his end of life wishes. We are grateful his suffering has come to a close and he ultimately was able to control his life and death.

Deepest gratitude, Sarah and Charles' entire family

Thank you again for all the kind guidance you gave my mother and our family during her final months. You gave us knowledge to better advocate for her rights to pass away peacefully the way she wanted, which was a great relief to her and our entire family. Thanks for all that you and End of Life WA do for the community.

- Susan



The key to our success rests in people like you, who contribute to making a tangible difference in peoples' lives.

Guiding Clients to Find Solace at the End-of-Life, continued.

by EOLWA Staff

Eventually, Carl decided to complete the VCA training and became a second for several months before taking on the role of primary VCA about two years ago. "I volunteer with a few different organizations, and there is no shortage of good causes. It's challenging to decide where to give your time and money, and I want to ensure death with dignity is always an option."

Volunteer Client Advisors at End of Life Washington guide clients through the process of using the Death with Dignity law, starting with the client's first oral request made to their physician, through the 15-day waiting period, a second oral request, helping them get their prescription, preparing the medication, and supporting them as they self-administer the medication. VCAs start their experience as a "second" or an assistant to an experienced VCA; once they learn the process and feel comfortable, they can take on clients alone.

"I found that while it wasn't easy, I thought I was good at it, and

there was so much gratitude, reassurance, and relief leading up to that final day [with the client]. It became unexpectedly very important to me."

When Carl tells his friends about his work with EOLWA, they often ask, "how do you do it? Doesn't it get you down?" While being a VCA can be tough and emotional, Carl says it doesn't get him down, and he experiences satisfaction from his work with EOLWA.

"I feel good about the work we do together; it has given me an additional surprise purpose, something I never imagined I'd be doing. There is something special about speaking openly and honestly about an experience as intimate and personal as how you want your life to end. I find myself discussing something terribly personal with total strangers who are glad to see me. There is something very singular about that first connection; it is unusually rewarding."

For Carl, the biggest reward of being a VCA is helping clients

know what end-of-life options are available to them so they have the freedom to die on their own terms. "When the family is on board, precious moments are shared." Carl understands that these are difficult conversations to have, and he hopes to give volunteers, clients, and donors the information they need to make an informed decision about their next steps. "The gratitude the clients show me very much takes me by surprise. Even if they don't end up taking the medication, there is some solace to be found, knowing they can pick up the phone and we'll be there."

When asked about his experience being part of EOLWA and the end-of-life community, Carl said, "I really enjoy the company of my fellow VCAs; they're smart, funny, slightly twisted. I have always felt supported every step of the way by the VCAs and staff at End of Life Washington. It's not often someone can enjoy that level of fellowship. In my professional life, that has not always been the case, and it is very satisfying to be part of this team committed to mutual support."

Making It Possible Together

In 1988 a small group of compassionate women and men gathered to bring the conversation about death with dignity to Washington state. First gathered as The Hemlock Society, now 35 years later, End of Life Washington has morphed and grown into one of the nation's foremost Medical Aid in Dying (MAiD) organizations. We're celebrated as leaders, looked to for expertise, and invited to advise lawmakers, medical professionals, nascent efforts, and startups.

Passionately committed people have stewarded the arc of challenges and successes, exponential growth, and cultural changes across decades. You're among this passionate and dedicated group of change-makers. You've been along for many of the highlight moments, and we know that your commitment to this important human rights movement is woven into your thinking, values, and commitment to creating a world that works for all.

Since its inception, EOLWA has served over thousands of people along a continuum of care, from an initial inquiry for information to specific resources. About 30% of the people we serve choose medical aid-in-dying with support from staff and our phenomenal and skilled VCAs (Volunteer Client Advisors), without whom EOLWA could not serve as we do.

As spring makes her way into our lives and reminds us of the fundamental inevitability of rebirth, please take a moment to reflect on the breadth of cultural changes that have happened since 1988. The many cycles of birth, death, and rebirth that all of us have matured through deepen commitment, capacity, skills, and reach. Thank you for being woven into this community of care.

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Rebe Brown
Client Services Contractor

Rebecca Hudson
Client Services Coordinator

Rebecca Lane
Interim Executive Director



Advancing Knowledge on Medical Aid-in-Dying

by EOLWA Staff

Over 25 people from the End of Life Washington community attended the National Clinicians Conference on Medical Aid in Dying (NCCMAID) held in Portland, Oregon, on February 17-18. This conference, which first occurred in 2020, originates from the need for exploration, clinical discussion, and evidence-based knowledge about medical aid-in-dying. EOLWA community members led, moderated, or participated in the following panels and networking sessions:

Clinician Attendance on the Aid-in-Dying day — Doctors, nurses, volunteers, end-of-life doulas, hospice staff (Chris Fruitrich, VCA and team leader)

The Pharmacology of Aid-in-Dying and a Red Flags Update (Dr. Carol Parrot, volunteer physician)

Grief Support after Medical Aid-in-Dying (Sally Thomae, MSW, Contractor)

Socially Challenging Settings and Circumstances — homeless and impoverished; family conflicts; skilled nursing and long-term care facilities (Rebecca

Hudson, MA, Client Support Coordinator)

State Organizational Leadership Challenges Networking Group (Dr. Jess Kaan, Medical Director)

The inauguration of the Journal of Aid-in-Dying Medicine was announced during the conference. EOLWA's Medical Director, Dr. Jess Kaan, has volunteered to be on the editorial board. If you would like more information about the journal, please visit the Journal of Aid-in-Dying Medicine – American Clinicians Academy on Medical Aid-in-Dying (acamaid.org/journal).

It was wonderful to interact with folks from all over doing the same work as us. It was particularly interesting to learn about the differences between the laws in different states and how state-specific organizations manage those differences. It was also great to hear about the other states working on legislation similar to ours to reduce barriers to access. What was very evident at the conference is how well-regarded End of Life Washington is -- we are recognized as leaders in this work, and we should all be proud of that!



Your life. Your death. Your choice.

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With GiveBIG 2023 just a few days away,
we invite you to join us in this 48-hour
giving event is May 2-3.

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