

Hemlock Society of Florida, Inc.

Beacon

*Shedding Light on the Right-to-Die
for the terminally ill in Florida*

Winter 2007

President's Letter

Happy New Year to you from the Board of Directors of the new Hemlock Society of Florida (HSOF).

2007 will be an exciting year for Florida. Since we are now independent and have reclaimed our original name, we have much to accomplish in order to become a strong Florida organization.

People have called us asking how our new organization may affect their membership in Compassion and Choices. If you have paid dues to C&C, you continue to be one of their members. But to join HSOF, as well or instead, your yearly dues of \$20 per person should go directly to the Melbourne address on page 2. This Beacon contains a membership form for your convenience.

Dues to HSOF are not tax deductible for you. Donations to the Hemlock Foundation of Florida are, and are seriously needed. Please consider underwriting some of our expenditures for telephone listings, postage and office supplies. The cost of printing and mailing the Beacon has always been around \$2,000 per issue. If you feel generous, why not contribute funds toward publishing all or part of one issue of the Beacon? With your permission, we will gladly credit your name (names if you donate with a friend or a group) in that issue. Also please remember that we

have never had any paid staff — we are all volunteers.

The scope of the Hemlock Society of Florida will widen as we grow. We will support the formation and maintenance of local chapters statewide. These groups will update their members and the public about choice-in-dying developments as they occur. Board members will be glad to counsel chapters and act as speakers for meetings. We have videos and books to lend for personal or chapter use, and books that are free for the asking (see list on page 6). Also, the Hemlock Foundation of Florida will continue to distribute the Advance Directive packet free of charge to anyone requesting it.

Another important item on our agenda is to start a web site. Hopefully, you will read more about this in our next issue of the Beacon.

One thing the Board has determined that we cannot do is offer a service such as Caring Friends/Client Support Volunteers (offered by Compassion & Choices) or Exit Guides (offered by Final Exit Network). There are many reasons why we decided that it is not feasible at this time. Our primary thrust right now is to gain members and educate the public via the local chapters.

This is a new venture for all of us and we will need help. This newsletter contains a questionnaire which we're asking you to complete and return to us if you can offer support of any kind. I know there are many professionals among you and your valuable input will help us better serve the people of Florida.

Let's work together to make 2007 the best year ever! I look forward to hearing from you.

Donna

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Hemlock Society of Florida, Inc.

Beacon Newsletter

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A Brief History of the Florida Hemlock Society

by Robert Rivas

The board of directors of the former Hemlock Society of Florida — which recently became known as "End-of-Life Choices Florida" — has voted to sever its relations with the national group and again call itself the Hemlock Society of Florida.

With this issue of the Beacon, we are now inviting our Florida members to join us. A new membership form is included on page 7. The Florida organization will consist of two not-for-profit corporations, the Hemlock Foundation and the Hemlock Society. Your donations to the Foundation will be tax deductible. The Society will be funded by your dues, which are not tax deductible. We will seek to promote public awareness and support for an individual's right to die with dignity, without interference and control by the state over the choices one must make in the dying process, including the choice of whether to hasten one's death.

Our members have expressed confusion about the current state of the death-with-dignity movement and its supporting organizations. Here is a brief survey of how the Florida group arrived in 2007 as an independent organization.

The national Hemlock Society was founded in 1980 under the leadership of Derek Humphry. The 1991 publication of Humphry's book, "Final Exit: The Practicalities of Self-Deliverance for the Terminally Ill,"

was a milestone in the movement toward individual liberty in the manner of one's death.

Compassion in Dying was formed in 1993 in Portland, Oregon. Through the rest of the 1990s, Compassion in Dying and the Denver-based Hemlock Society competed for attention and leadership in the movement at the national level. The Florida chapter of The Hemlock Society started as a local Sarasota group, Suncoast Hemlock, in 1987. A statewide Florida chapter of The Hemlock Society was started in 1994. These two organizations merged and Suncoast became a local chapter of the state group.

In 2003 the national-level Hemlock Society changed its name to "End-of-Life Choices." The Florida group accordingly changed its name from Hemlock Society of Florida to End-of-Life Choices Florida. This was the first of a series of steps that caused confusion and consternation among our Florida members. As if to contribute or add to the confusion, a new national group, the Final Exit Network, was being created at about this time by a number of former Hemlock Society leaders who had left because of their dissatisfaction with the changes taking place in the national organization, of which the name change was only a part.

Continued on page 3

End-of-Life Choices and Compassion in Dying were in drawn-out merger talks in 2004 and finally did merge in January 2005. The new group decided to maintain two national offices, in Portland, Oregon and Denver, and two "co"-chief executives. The new group was named Compassion & Choices. Florida never made the name change. Indeed, the Florida board members unanimously thought Compassion & Choices was a ludicrous name.

The Florida board became increasingly alienated from the "C&C" leadership. It appeared to us that C&C really did not want to have local chapters at all, except in name. C&C sought to have the Florida organization sign a contract to join C&C and enact new bylaws written by the national organization. Between the contract and the new bylaws, C&C would have taken complete control of the Florida organization's activities and policies, and yet the Florida leadership would have had no input at all into national policies and governance. Revenue from our Florida members' dues would stream into the national coffers and would be returned to support the Florida organization's activities only to the extent the national group chose to send it back. Historically, the Florida organization had an arm's-length, mutually supportive relationship with the national-level Hemlock Society. Under this arrangement Florida was entitled to, and received, a share of the dues generated from our Florida efforts and membership.

From the first day of the C&C merger, the Florida board never agreed to join C&C and never considered itself a member of C&C. Instead, we were considering our options.

Similarly mutinous conversations were transpiring in state chapters of the former Hemlock Society all across the country. Some took opinion polls of their membership as to what to do, as did Florida. Some state organizations closed down rather than join C&C. Some joined Final Exit Network, an idea the Florida directors considered. San Diego is now becoming independent and, like Florida, is going to call itself a local Hemlock Society, unaffiliated with any national organization.

The Florida board members agonized at many board

meetings throughout 2005 and 2006 about what to do. We hope you will share your thoughts with us, become active in our organization, and help us build the future of the Florida death-with-dignity movement.

CAN YOU HELP US?

By Portia Westerfield

The Hemlock Society of Florida, Inc. (HSOF) is not only reborn, but is a very new organization traveling a path that promises to be tricky for a while. Many, many things need to be done, by a Board with now only five people. We're dedicated and hard-working, with long histories in the right-to-die movement. But we can't do everything alone, especially since we're all over sixty, when energy levels may not be as consistently high as before.

So...we need HELP. That means YOU! We urgently need your knowledge, talent, and professional and life experience to help HSOF support the people of our state in their management of late-life issues.

Are you, or have you been, a healthcare or legal professional, a writer, graphic designer, public relations person, advertising guru, software designer or otherwise computer expert? Have you been involved in the management of a company, as an administrative assistant, treasurer or other corporate officer?

Do you have experience in the financial community, as a stockbroker, financial advisor, bond trader, banker? Have you worked in any level of government, such as city or county commissioner? Are you a media person, with newspaper or TV experience? Are you a minister or other clerical professional? Are you or were you a law-enforcement specialist? What kind of volunteer experience would you list on a resume?

In order to assist the HSOF Board in recruiting helpers, a questionnaire is included with this newsletter. Please take the time to complete and return this important document.

Member Comments

Musings By Robert Rivas

Having been a member of the Hemlock Society since the mid-1990s, and having remained as a member of the Florida chapter when the national Hemlock Society elected to change its name to "End-of-Life Choices," I remember the exact moment I knew I did not care to be a member any more.

I reluctantly accepted the national organization's misguided decision to change its name, though I always thought the Hemlock Society was a good name. I was even prepared to accept the merger of Compassion in Dying and End-of-Life Choices into "Compassion & Choices." But I felt the newly "unified" organization abandoned its principles and the very purpose for its existence shortly before Terry Schiavo died on March 31, 2005.

Before I go on, I should say: This article is my personal opinion. As their legal advisor, I do not speak for the Florida organization's board members. But I digress.

As worldwide publicity over Schiavo's impending death reached a fever pitch, I opened an e-mail from C&C, apparently addressed to people C&C considered opinion leaders. An attachment to the e-mail provided "talking points" for people to use in discussing the Schiavo debacle. My jaw dropped as I read the first paragraph, under the boldface heading, "Our Position."

"Compassion & Choices has no position on whether Terri Schiavo's gastric feeding tube should be removed or reinstated. Health care decisions should be made by the individual or legally designated proxy."

No position? Imagine my surprise when, a few paragraphs later, the "talking points" said,

"When advance directives are lacking and family members disagree on appropriate care, the best resolution can be obtained through the court system, which can carefully and impartially consider the evidence."

How could these two paragraphs be squared with each other? In the Schiavo case, state and federal courts had devoted an astounding amount of time to "carefully and impartially" considering the evidence. If C&C actually believed the latter paragraph, C&C would have to take the position that Terri Schiavo's right to the removal of her gastric feeding tube was well established. C&C's own policies required C&C to support Terri Schiavo's right to die because "the best resolution" had been "obtained through the court system."

I initiated days of extensive e-mail discussions between me and various C&C officials, with our back-and-forth being copied to scores of other bystanders, some of whom occasionally joined in. I kept demanding a logical explanation of how C&C's stated policies could be reconciled with taking "no position on whether Terry Schiavo's gastric feeding tube should be removed." I received only double talk and evasion in response. Eventually, C&C's president, Barbara Coombs Lee, called me to talk about it, probably because she wanted to

OTHER NEWS

Dr. Kevorkian will finally be released from prison on parole June 1. Dr. Kevorkian will be 79 years old in April and will have served more than eight years. The doctor is in poor health, suffering from diabetes, heart problems and several other ailments. We would like to applaud the Michigan parole board for their decision.

As background, Dr. Jack Kevorkian was convicted of second-degree murder for assisting Thomas Youk to end his life. Mr. Youk suffered from ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) which rendered him physically unable to end his own life as he wanted. He implored Dr. Kevorkian to help him. Kevorkian physically assisted Mr. Youk and the incident was videotaped. It was later shown on the national television show, "Sixty Minutes".

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Florida Hemlock Society

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stop the e-mails. She basically said that C&C saw the Schiavo case as an opportunity to get quoted in the media in a positive, warm and fuzzy light. She did not wish to lose the sympathy and support of those media listeners and readers who would disagree if she were to say that Terry Schiavo had a right to die.

So, when the rest of us were on the ramparts, C&C was absent without leave. An organization cannot be in the vanguard of a movement while AWOL.

MEETINGS

Since many of you receiving this Beacon are members of Compassion and Choices, you may have received an announcement of upcoming Compassion and Choices Client Support Training sessions for Florida volunteers. I have received word that there will be two upcoming training sessions in April. Please contact Julian Rush (800-247-7421) if you are interested in attending one of these sessions.

April 13-15, 2007 **Miami**

April 27-29, 2007 **Lakeland**

AROUND THE WORLD

A look at legislation covering euthanasia and assisted suicide in the industrialized world.

From the Associated Press, December 21, 2006

ITALY — Euthanasia is illegal in the heavily Roman Catholic nation. Assisted suicide can carry a sentence of up to 15 years in prison.

NETHERLANDS — Euthanasia was legalized in 2001, but the practice was common for at least a decade before that. Under the law, patients must be terminally ill, in unbearable pain and two doctors must agree there is no prospect for recovery.

BELGIUM — Legalized euthanasia under similar conditions as the Netherlands in 2002.

SWITZERLAND — Allows passive assistance to terminally ill people who have expressed a wish to die.

BRITAIN — Passed a law in 2004 allowing living wills or documents that set out what medical treatment patients want if they become seriously ill and lose the capacity to make a decision. In May, the House of Lords rejected legislation that would have allowed doctors to prescribe lethal drug doses to terminally ill patients.

FRANCE — Enables the terminally ill or those with no hope of recovery to refuse treatment in favor of death. Doctors are allowed to administer painkillers, even if their secondary effects include shortening patients' lives. But the law stops short of allowing euthanasia.

SPAIN — Euthanasia is illegal in Spain and people who help someone else die can be punished with at least six months in prison. But Spain's Socialist government wants to legalize it as part of a wave of liberal reforms that have largely transformed this traditionally Roman Catholic country.

UNITED STATES — U.S. law generally permits patients to ask that medical treatment be withheld or withdrawn, even if it raises their risk of dying. Voters in Oregon went further and approved the first physician-assisted suicide law in the U.S. in 1994.

AUSTRALIA — Australia's Northern Territory province legalized mercy killing in 1996 and pro-euthanasia physician Dr. Philip Nitschke helped four people die before federal lawmakers overturned the provincial legislation.

OTHER — The U.N. Human Rights Committee criticized Dutch legalization in 2001. The Council of Europe, Europe's top human rights body, rejected euthanasia as a legitimate means to end life in April 2005.

HEMLOCK FOUNDATION OF FLORIDA, INC. BOOK LIST

The following books are free upon request. Just phone (800-849-9349) or send an e-mail (HemlockFL@aol.com). A donation to the Hemlock Foundation of Florida, Inc. to cover shipping costs would be appreciated.

Common Sense Suicide: The Final Right

by Doris Portwood (© 1989)

Compassionate Crimes, Broken Taboos

(news articles) (Fall 1986)

Dealing Creatively with Death

by Ernest Morgan (© 1990)

Double Exit

by Ann Wickett (© 1989)

Euthanasia and Religion

by Gerald Larue (© 1985)

Last Wish

by Betty Rollin (© 1985)

Lawful Exit

by Derek Humphry (© 1993)

Let Me Die Before I Wake

1991 Edition, by Derek Humphry (© 1984 & 1986)

The Right to Die

by Derek Humphry & Ann Wickett (© 1986)

Terminally Ill Patients and The Right to Die

Edited by Michele A. Trepkowski (© 1993)

Community Contacts

*If there is no contact listed for your area, please phone
1-800-849-9349 (Hemlock Society of Florida)*

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Hemlock Society of Florida, Inc.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Membership dues will be **\$20 per person per year**

New Member Name: _____
(Make check payable to Hemlock Society of Florida, Inc.)

New Member Name: _____
(Make check payable to Hemlock Society of Florida, Inc.)

Additional Donation Amount _____
(If you would like a tax credit for this donation, make check payable to Hemlock Foundation of Florida, Inc.)

Beacon Donation Amount _____
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Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ ZIP _____

Home phone: _____

Work phone: _____

E-mail: _____

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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Winter 2007

Mission Statement

Dedicated to improving the quality of dying through education and advocacy, thereby empowering all citizens to make and carry out their own end-of-life decisions. We affirm the individual's dignity and free will throughout life, including the freedom to hasten death under certain circumstances.

*Pass this newsletter on to your physician as well as interested friends who may want to join us.
If you would like additional copies please send request to
P. O. Box 121093, West Melbourne, FL 32912-1093.*

*If you no longer wish to receive this newsletter,
please contact the president at 800-849-9349 or HemlockFL@aol.com.*

Don't forget to return your questionnaire!