







## *Dr. Rodney Syme (1935-2021)*

### **Compassionate, caring and kind to his fellow human beings**

Dr. Rodney Syme was a third-generation surgeon. In 1974 he encountered a patient with excruciating suffering which doctors were unable to relieve. He recognised that that the approach to pain relief for terminally ill patients needed to change. This eventually set him on his path to advocate for a law enabling voluntary assisted dying. However, law reform to allow VAD was very slow in coming. Syme, at considerable personal risk, provided free counselling to thousands of people suffering at end of life, as he developed expertise in the subject. He also provided some people with medication which they could use to end their lives, though this was against the law. Unable to get traction with law reform, Syme went public about these activities, in an effort to bring the matter before the courts, for a common-law ruling. But the authorities had no interest in challenging him in this way. For decades Syme was president and vice-president of Dying with Dignity Victoria (DWDV), the law-reform and advocacy organisation advancing the VAD cause in Victoria, Australia. He made a significant contribution to DWDV's submission to the Victorian government's Inquiry into End-of-life Choices in 2015 and also appeared as a witness before the inquiry. Rodney Syme was 2017 Australian Humanist of the Year and received the WFRtDS Health Professional Award for 2014. He was tireless in the application of his keen mind to his advocacy, counselling and teaching activities, courageous in his actions and above all, compassionate, caring and kind to his fellow human beings.





*Ian Wood*

## **Giving a voice to those of faith who support VAD**

It is with honour that I write this testimonial on behalf of a truly inspirational gentleman: Ian Wood, co-founder of Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Assisted Dying (based in New South Wales), Australia. All of the six Australian states that have now passed Voluntary Assisted Dying legislation, and many lobby groups outside of Australia, recognise and appreciate the incredible contribution made by Ian (now 81 years of age!) for his Herculean contribution to the voluntary assisted dying movement over many years. VAD advocates, globally, recognise the negative impact religion plays through fear-mongering arguments, when it comes to progressing the voluntary assisted dying movement. Ian has successfully made it his mission to ensure the many voices of those of faith, who support voluntary assisted dying, continue to be heard and shared with our key decision-makers. Ian is to be commended for his gentle but incredibly influential and powerful knowledge when it comes to biblical reference and support for the cause. His voice has proved to be crucial and balanced over and over again in key parliamentary settings. Whether it be out amongst the public, campaigning, distributing information by hand, or spending hours preparing information packages and posting to reach those who do not have access to technology, his efforts are simply admirable. He has also demonstrated courage in the public arena, with counter-arguments to the divisive and negative opinions voiced by some of the most senior representatives of opposing religious groups. Ian has truly earned his place in the World of Champions.







*Dinny Laurence*

## **Worked ceaselessly and with utmost dedication to get assisted dying legislation passed**

Dinny Laurence is the unsung hero of the Australian voluntary assisted dying (VAD) campaign. Joining the committee of Dying with Dignity WA at a critical point for the organisation, Dinny stepped forward and took on the role of campaign manager. For four years she worked ceaselessly and with the utmost dedication, intelligence and determination to get assisted dying legislation passed in Western Australia. These campaigns are never easy, and Dinny faced many challenges. There was little money to run an effective campaign, so she had to organise fundraising events, not a task that came naturally to her. She had to deal with personalities - power-mongers, egomaniacs, and religious right fanatics. She worked long hours, with a remarkable attention to detail and a warmth and humility that is rare. But what really took its toll was dealing with literally hundreds of people with heartbreaking stories about their terrible experiences of watching a loved one die an agonising death. Committed to the cause and involved in every aspect of the campaign, Dinny was steadfast in doing what she needed to do. It goes without saying that this work was voluntary, and it continued after the passage of the legislation when she conducted a series of workshops during the Act's implementation phase. Dinny is the epitome of the totally committed and hard-working quiet achiever.





*Hon. Mike Maffney MLC, Member for Mersey*

## **A genuinely impartial approach and open-door policy for all sides to actively engage**

When you first meet Mike, you're struck by the warmth of his greeting; backed up with bright-eyed energy, genuine enthusiasm, a firm handshake and a winning smile – it's like bumping into an old friend that you haven't seen in years. It's these qualities that were the catalyst in bringing our community together for what was the fourth, and now successful effort in bringing voluntary-assisted-dying legislation to Tasmania. Looking back at the Bill's evolution, it's mindful to note that it took two-years of widespread input and consultation, with the active support of the Office of Parliamentary Counsel to draft the proposed legislation and the subsequent refinements. As part of this process, Mike led 115 community and stakeholder forums, across Tasmania, to consider and incorporate community feedback with a genuinely impartial approach and an open-door policy for all sides to actively engage with him. These elements in the process were crucial in garnering community understanding and confidence in the Bill, and for Members of the Legislative Council, Tasmania's Upper House, who voted unanimously for the Bill; the first time this has ever happened in the passage of VAD legislation. Mike always gratefully acknowledges the enduring advocacy of so many individuals and community groups, together with the assistance from national and international experts, organisations, governments, academia, law and medical specialists; all have worked tirelessly to support this legislative process. However, without Mike there wouldn't have been a natural champion to bring us all together, and for this Tasmanians will be forever in his debt.





*Dr McLaren*

## **An unwavering commitment and selfless dedication to his patients**

Dr McLaren is a Medical Oncologist from Victoria, Australia. He signed up to provide VAD assessments to Victorians from the day it became legally available. In Victoria, one of the doctors assessing eligibility must be a specialist in the area of disease that the patient has. Due to the low uptake by his colleagues, Dr McLaren began to be asked if he would assist other doctors' patients to access VAD, and his answer has never been "no". In the three years of operation of VAD in Victoria, Dr McLaren has been involved in over 200 cases of application, often attending in support of his patients and their families if the patients choose to take their VAD medicines. He has championed the right of patients to access this option, and is dedicated to sharing his craft, and encouraging other doctors to answer their patients' pleas. Dr McLaren is a Board member of Dying with Dignity Victoria (DWDV), one of the Clinical Moderators of the Victorian VAD Community of Practice, and is the Founding Director of VADANZ (Voluntary Assisted Dying, Australia and New Zealand). He has been involved in sharing his experience and contributing to legislative development and implementation of VAD in Western Australia, Tasmania, South Australia, Queensland, New South Wales, New Zealand, and in the United Kingdom.





