

“Do the training, even if your values do not align”, PCPA experts explore the moral minefield of Voluntary Assisted Dying

Canberra: Australia’s pioneer experts in Voluntary Assisted Dying (VAD) have called on all cancer specialists and GPs to undertake training for this controversial and legalised end-of-life decision by patients, even if it doesn’t align with their respective values or views.



PCPA Victorian Director and board member, Dr Cam McLaren, led an emotive and powerful podcast with colleagues, PCPA member and genetic oncologist, Dr Hilda High and Ms Laurie Draper from the Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator Service, to help colleagues and patients navigate the complex and challenging medical and moral mine field of VAD.

Australians with terminal cancer dominate the VAD patient requests and yet there is a critical shortage of GPs and oncologists willing to sign up to the training and end-of-life program.

Voluntary assisted dying laws¹ allow terminally ill, mentally competent adults with 6-12 months left to live to request help from their doctor to end their suffering.

Most states have now embraced this end-of-life choice option, including Western Australia, Victoria, Tasmania, South Australia, Queensland and most recently, New South Wales, with legislation set to commence there in November this year.

Ms Draper said if doctors complete the Voluntary Assisted Dying training, they will have an understanding of all of the issues and complexities and can better support their patients, even without committing to the undertaking the VAD process.

“The next step is to work through how to balance your conscientious objections against the needs and wants of your patients,” Dr McLaren observed. “People need to feel supported in their beliefs as well. We need not to judge the individual - doctor or patient - and the only way through this is to be as informed as possible about the process.”

The podcasters discussed the privacy issues around the naming of the doctors who were open to VAD. The navigators’ service is linked to the VAD doctors privately. Although the service is available to the public, there is no public ‘list’ of VAD-trained or VAD-providing doctors.

Dr McLaren, Dr High and Ms Draper also delved into the challenge of time and remuneration. Although standard MBS reimbursements are available for VAD consultations, Medicare excludes funding specifically for “euthanasia and any service directly related to the procedure”. Although many doctors engage in VAD service provision for altruistic reasons, the podcasters agreed that all doctors should be compensated for the considerable time and care they spend with end-of-life VAD patients.

They also discussed the ultimate rationale for patients to participate in VAD programs.

“We need to adopt a mature approach to this issue,” Dr McLaren said. “We are all working to improve end-of-life care and we all need to appreciate and prioritise the person in the chair and their views and wishes.” ENDS

The podcast was delivered by PCPA Education Partners, Science to Life.

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¹ <https://www.healthdirect.gov.au/voluntary-assisted-dying>

PCPA Cancer Patient Management podcast #4



There are two pending conferences about VAD:

- [Go Gentle Australia](#) and [VADANZ](#) (Voluntary Assisted Dying Australia & NZ) present the inaugural Voluntary Assisted Dying National Conference in Sydney - 27-28 Sept 2023
- [NSW Health voluntary assisted dying conference – 29 sept 2023](#)

About Us

The [Private Cancer Physicians of Australia \(PCPA\)](#) is a not-for-profit member organisation dedicated to the improvement of the health system for all cancer patients, but particularly for private cancer patients in Australia. Our members are medical and radiation oncologists and haematologists.

Our mission is to promote and work towards a health system that provides high quality, fair, integrated cancer treatment that benefits patients and supports medical practitioners.

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Through our immersive [Strategic Alliance Partnership](#) program, we are bringing together the best minds in cancer care diagnosis and treatment, hospital and clinical trial innovation, advanced technology and equitable health policy to the long term benefit of our patients.

Founding Partners:



PCPA's Education partner

PCPA is working with our experienced health education partners, ScienceToLife, to help us deliver seamless and immersive masterclass opportunities for our Strategic Alliance Partners.