

## Letter to the Newcastle Herald published 26 April 2017

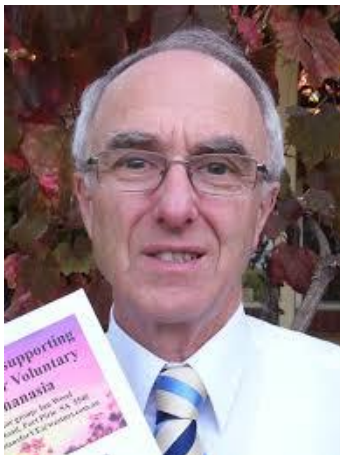
*Letter in response to Editorial in Newcastle Herald: 'Hunter campaign to improve palliative care services' 20 Apr 2017 (<http://www.theherald.com.au/story/4608182/palliative-care-a-path-to-dying-with-dignity/>)*

Regarding the editorial ('Palliative care a path to dying with dignity', Herald, 20/4). It is excellent that palliative care services may be improved in the Hunter and made more readily available. However, I do question the sentence: "Whether in a hospice, a hospital or at home, palliative care can make dying with dignity a reality, and not just a hope."

The reality is that one in six patients in the terminal phase of their terminal illness report moderate to severe distress from pain and one in six report moderate to severe distress from breathlessness. While palliative care is excellent at controlling most symptoms, there are some for whom adequate control is impossible. Then palliative care may use the last resort of terminal sedation, also known as slow euthanasia, whereby a patient is put into a coma until they starve or dehydrate to death. Many would prefer to have the option of a dose of fatal medication that would enable death within minutes rather than having their families watch a slow deterioration and death by starvation.

Anglican Canon Rosie Harper of the UK describes the assisted death of her uncle in Switzerland: "My uncle had a beautiful death, with his family around him – good music, good wine, and a pain-free end. The days that would have followed as he struggled through the end stage of a brain tumor would have been terrible. He had no choice about dying. He did have choice about the manner of his death."

To make dying with dignity a reality, excellent palliative care and the legal option to choose an assisted death are both required.



by Ian Wood,  
National co-ordinator, Christians Supporting Choice for Voluntary Euthanasia