

SUBMISSION

PALLIATIVE CARE IN AUSTRALIA

We appreciate the opportunity to submit the following remarks regarding palliative care in Australia.

Although we are neither medical professionals or carers, we believe that we are in a situation which enables us to approach this subject on various fronts - as parent/step parent of a handicapped adult; as adults who have experienced the slow and sometimes painful deaths of loved ones; and as a couple who are in our "latter years".

The subject of palliative care is a very wide and involved one. People of all ages, from children to the aged are in need of this care. Cultural, religious, and language issues need to be addressed, among other things.

The two main areas which we would like to address are education and communication.

Education

On-going, practical education is critical for both carers and family members of those needing palliative care.

We believe that it is important for family members to receive basic education in caring for their loved ones. Many family members feel ill-equipped and helpless. As much as they would love to look after their child/adolescent/husband/wife/parent they lack the knowledge. There is no doubt that people want to stay in their own homes with their family, friends, and possessions around them, as long as possible. Money spent on training and equipping family members would save the Government money in the long run, and even extend the lives of those in care.

Although carers receive training to enable them to be employed in their jobs, they will continually come across situations which they are unfamiliar with, or feel unable to handle. Opportunities for them to discuss their difficulties, and to learn from others must be available to them on a regular basis.

Communication

From our experience we have seen a lack of communication between medical practitioners, carers and those in care. There are many family members who do not know what help is available for their loved ones, or themselves, or how to seek that help. We have also seen a lack of assistance in this area within Centrelink. Sometimes counselling may be needed for the family and this needs to be recognised and addressed in a sensitive and caring manner.

Above all else, the wellbeing of those in need must be the priority. For every child/adolescent/adult to have quality of life, and for all of us to know that help is at hand.

Alan and Janet Broadstock