

A Better Exit Board Members Attend an International Conference



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A Better Exit's Vice President, Christie Golemb and Treasurer Janet Hager traveled to Ireland in September to attend the World Federation of Right to Die Societies Biannual Conference.

Conference Highlights: A Global Push for Medical Aid in Dying



Christie Golemb, Vice President, A Better Exit

Last month, Dublin became the center of an important conversation on the future of Medical Aid in Dying (MAiD), as the World Federation of Right to Die Societies (WFRtDS) hosted its biannual conference.

Representatives from over 80 organizations worldwide came together to share their experiences, ideas, and hopes for a more compassionate approach to end-of-life care. Countries like Ireland, Japan, and Norway, which are actively working on passing MAiD legislation, took the stage to share their unique journeys, challenges, and progress.

One of the key takeaways? Switzerland and Canada continue to serve as shining examples of how broad access to MAiD can be achieved. Both countries allow MAiD for a wide range of reasons, providing people with the ability to die with dignity on their own terms. The conversations in Dublin echoed the importance of making MAiD accessible, not restrictive.

Challenging the “Slippery Slope” Argument

Many opponents of MAiD often cite the "slippery slope" argument—fearing that broader access might lead to unintended consequences. But what's so wrong with a slippery slope? Consider the social changes that have come about because of it: the right to vote for women, the abolition of slavery, the push for LGBTQ+ rights. These movements transformed societies for the better by challenging restrictive norms and giving individuals the freedom to make their own choices. Couldn't expanding MAiD access do the same?

The Role of Physicians: A Key to Success

One essential ingredient in advancing MAiD is the support of physicians, especially palliative care doctors who are closely aligned with the goals of MAiD. Their focus on reducing suffering and enhancing quality of life makes them natural allies in this cause. Convincing more medical professionals to support MAiD can pave the way for better access and understanding, ensuring patients receive the care they need when they need it.

Laws Must Be Patient-Centric

While legal protections are necessary, the language used in current MAiD laws often creates unnecessary hurdles for patients. In many cases, these laws are more about protecting doctors and legal systems than they are about supporting patient choice. The focus must shift to a patient-centered approach, where dignity, autonomy, and ease of access are prioritized. It's crucial that MAiD laws are designed with patients in mind, ensuring that the process is clear, compassionate, and accessible.

Addressing Alzheimer's in MAiD

Alzheimer's disease was a major topic at the conference, as it remains the number one condition that patients want included in MAiD laws. Current criteria, which often require mental capacity and a prognosis of less than six months or one year to live, exclude those with dementia—leaving them with little control over their end-of-life decisions. This is a critical issue that needs to be addressed in future legislation, ensuring that patients with dementia can access MAiD before their condition robs them of the ability to make autonomous choices.

It's Not Just About Dying—It's About Peace of Mind

For many, the availability of MAiD isn't only about the act of dying—it's about the peace of mind it brings while they are still alive. Knowing that they have control over their final moments can offer immense relief, allowing them to live more fully, with dignity and confidence. This is why access to MAiD should be about more than just the act—it's about empowering people to face the end of life on their own terms.

A Special Appearance: Sean Davison

One of the most poignant moments of the conference was the attendance of Sean Davison, who earlier this year was arrested in England for helping a woman travel to Switzerland to die. His presence at the conference was a reminder of the personal risks many advocates face in pushing for a right to die with dignity. His story resonates with the wider movement's goals—ensuring that no one has to cross borders or face criminal charges for helping someone achieve a compassionate end.

As the fight for broader access to MAiD continues, it's clear that there is much work ahead. But with conferences like WFRtDS and the dedication of advocates around the world, there is hope that more countries will soon follow in the footsteps of Switzerland and Canada.

