

Australia's Dr. Death Spreading the assisted-suicide gospel.

By Wesley J. Smith, November 26, 2002,

There is an old folk wisdom: "You are known by the company you keep." As is true of most folk wisdom, the saying has much to recommend it. To use an extreme example, if you hung out with and financially supported a known terrorist, most people would reasonably think that you were a terrorist too.

Which brings to mind the Hemlock Society of the United States, perhaps the world's largest assisted-suicide advocacy group. No, they are not terrorists. But the organization's close association with and financial support for Australian suicide fanatic Dr. Philip Nitschke exposes how radical Hemlock really is.

For those who haven't heard of him, Nitschke is the Australian Jack Kevorkian. (The murderer Kevorkian is another Hemlock favorite despite his oft-stated goal of using assisted suicide to open the doors to "obituary," e.g., medical experimentation on people being euthanized.) While Nitschke doesn't publicly assist suicides and dump the bodies of victims at local hospitals the way Kevorkian did, he does travel Australia and New Zealand giving well publicized how-to-commit-suicide classes. He also manufactures plastic suicide bags — "the Exit Bag" — for distribution to members of an Australian euthanasia advocacy group. Nitschke also hopes to purchase a suicide death ship to take past the Great Barrier Reef into international waters where he would engage in the mass euthanasia of sick and disabled people who wanted to die.

As surreal and macabre as all of this may sound, it is actually pretty conventional assisted-suicide-advocacy fare. What makes Nitschke stand out from the pack is his desire to give troubled teenagers access to a suicide concoction — the so-called "peaceful pill" — that Nitschke is formulating from generally available household products.

Nitschke's promotion of suicide for troubled teens first came to light in [a 2001 interview on National Review Online](#). At one point, NRO's Kathryn Jean Lopez asked Nitschke who would qualify for access to his suicide pill. His response was as chilling in its candor as it was for its utter disregard for the value of human life:

This difficult question I will answer in two parts. My personal position is that if we believe that there is a right to life, and then we must accept that people have a right to dispose of that life whenever they want.... I do not believe that telling people they have a right to life while denying them the means, manner, or information necessary for them to give this life away has any ethical consistency. So *all people qualify*, not just those with the training, knowledge, or resources to find out how to 'give away' their life. And someone needs to provide this knowledge, training, or resource necessary to *anyone* who wants it, including the *depressed, the elderly bereaved, the troubled teen*. If we are to remain consistent and we believe that the individual has the right to dispose of their life, we should not erect artificial barriers in the way of subgroups that don't meet our criteria.

In other words, assisted suicide should not be restricted to one "subgroup" of people with terminal illnesses.

"This would mean," Nitschke continued, that the so-called peaceful pill should be *available in the supermarkets* so that those old enough to understand death could obtain death peacefully at the time of their choosing." (Emphasis added.)

Does Nitschke really believe this? Surely, some might say, he misspoke under the pressure of a microphone-in-the-face style interview.

But that excuse won't fly. This particular Q&A was done via e-mail — so Nitschke had all the time he needed to write and edit his responses to NRO's questions. Nitschke wrote those words because he deeply believes them.

Nitschke's actions match his advocacy. He is currently hip deep in a heated controversy surrounding the suicide of an Australian woman named Nancy Crick. Crick became famous in Australia when she announced publicly that she was under the care of Nitschke and was planning her suicide, because, she and Nitschke said, she was dying from terminal cancer. That put the Australian media into an American-style feeding frenzy, which became white-hot, when, after months of equivocating, she finally killed herself in front of a group of awestruck euthanasia advocates who actually applauded when she took the pills. (Nitschke, fearing jail, left Crick's side before she did the deed.)

Then came the autopsy. Oops. It turned out that Crick was *not* dying from cancer. Moreover, Nitschke soon admitted that he and Crick both knew that she wasn't terminally ill. However, rather than being repentant or embarrassed that he had supported Crick's suicide desire even though he knew she wasn't dying, Nitschke argued that her non-terminal condition was "irrelevant" because she was "hopelessly ill" with a painful digestive problem. Only later did he halfheartedly apologize for lying to the media.

How is Hemlock involved in this madness? The organization has paid Nitschke tens of thousands of dollars to develop the "peaceful pill." Moreover, despite his outspoken advocacy for making the peaceful pill available to troubled teens and in supermarkets, Hemlock recently invited Nitschke to present "What's New in Hastening the Dying Process" at their January National Convention in San Diego, Calif.

Clearly, the Hemlock Society likes Philip Nitschke.

This did not surprise those of us who pay close attention to Hemlock Society advocacy. In recent years, the organization's publicly stated beliefs have become increasingly Nitschke-like. For example, little noticed by the media, the Hemlock Society of the United States recently announced that it no longer wants to restrict the legalization of assisted suicide to people with terminal illnesses. Rather, it now urges that assisted suicide be available legally to people who are not dying, specifically to the "hopelessly ill," that is, to people like Nancy Crick.

Hemlock's leaders have privately expressed such beliefs for years. Thus, in 1998, Dr. Richard McDonald, Hemlock's medical director, joined Nitschke and other assisted-suicide physician ideologues in signing the "[Zurich Declaration on Assisted Dying](#)." Meant more for private rather than public consumption, the Zurich Declaration called for the legalization of assisted suicide "for all competent adults suffering severe and enduring distress." This comes very close to Nitschke's death-on-demand philosophy. No wonder Hemlock loves Nitschke.

Yes, we are known by the company we keep. Through their moral and financial support of the odious Philip Nitschke, the Hemlock Society has revealed its true colors. Society should judge the organization and its advocacy, accordingly.

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