

Cross Party Group on End of Life Choices
Annual General Meeting
24th November 2020 at 6pm
By Videocall

Convener
Michelle Ballantyne MSP

Vice-Conveners
Liam McArthur MSP/Jackson
Carlaw MSP

Secretary
Amanda Ward

MSP's in attendance are;

George Adam MSP
Patrick Harvie MSP
Liam McArthur MSP
Michelle Ballantyne MSP (Chair)

Other attendees:

Alyson Thomson, Marcos Andrade Neves, Hugh Wynne, Stacey Adam, Guinevere Williams, Hannah Bowes-Stuart, Mary Stewart, Sheila Duffy, Helen Wood, Harry McQuillan, Catherine Owen, Jane Rodgers, Alison Thomson, Moira Symons, Marjory Gibson, Alex Pandolfo, Lois Aitkenhead, Jean Clark, Charles Warlow, Joanna Garner, Gareth Morgan, Joanne Ramsay, Val Bissland, Daisy Garner, Lewis Waugh, Jennie Pollock, Una Baillie, Liam McArthur, Peter Crammond, Sheila Stevens, Pauline Winchester, Michael Chobli, Josh Mennies, Olivia Taylor, George Adam, Sophie Sellers, Michelle Ballantyne, Amanda Ward.

Michelle Ballantyne welcomes all in attendance to the Cross Party Group on End of Life Choices AGM.

Speaker Josh Aaron-Mennie

Michelle Ballantyne MSP started the meeting by introducing the first speaker for the evening, Josh Aaron-Mennie. Josh comes from a working background in social care and a career in supporting children and adults with learning disabilities and elderly people requiring support at home. Josh is also active in politics and sits on the executive committee of the Scottish National Party as convener of the party's LGBTQ+ with the group 'Out for Independence', where he has been involved with policy development on social care and LGBTQ+ matters.

After the excruciating and drawn-out death of his grandmother in September 2020 he promised he would do everything he could to give others access to a dignified death. He also will be putting a motion to the SNP conference based on this.

Josh thanked organisers for the invite and opportunity to speak at the CPG. He spoke about his background and about the incredibly difficult experience he and his

family endured around his grandmother's death. Josh went into depth re the final days of his grandmother's life, how he helped to care for her and the lasting effect that this has had on him. The audience were very moved by this retelling and offered sincere thanks and heartfelt condolences to Josh. The Convener thanked Josh for sharing his story and expressed that it was hard to hear even for herself who has worked as a nurse for many years. The convener also voiced that many will have had similar experiences to Josh and his family, and that it is important to harness this to take a bill forward to parliament that represents lived experience.

Speaker Professor Michael Chobli

The Convener welcomed the next speaker, Michael Chobli who is Chair of Philosophy at the University of Edinburgh, having recently moved to Edinburgh from the USA. Michael is founder of the International Association for the Philosophy of Death and Dying and former director of the California Centre for Ethics and Policy.

Michael spoke through his slideshow presentation about his experience and what he has learned from America, where he was involved with the legal challenge in California. He spoke about how the legal change has progressed in relation to assisted dying in California and advised how these lessons might affect legislation here in Scotland and the UK.

Currently, Michael is conducting research on assisted dying, suicide prevention and mental health, and has been working in this research area for 20 years. He has a wealth of experience talking to legislators and groups who both oppose and support the legislation of AD, so feels he brings a useful input to the process. Michael's slides are available for those who would like to see them. The Convener thanked Michael for his highly informative talk.

AGM Business

It was decided that with MSP's in quorate, we would take a short break before the speaker Q&A and move to AGM business.

Approval of minutes of the last meeting – 13th Nov 2019 (previous AGM.)

Michelle Ballantyne MSP asked for amendments or challenges, there were none. Liam McArthur MSP proposes the minute, Patrick Harvie MSP seconds. Minutes of the 2019 CPG AGM approved.

Election of office bearers

In office at present is;
Michelle Ballantyne MSP – Convenor
Jackson Carlaw MSP -Vice Convenor
Liam McArthur MSP – Vice Convenor
Amanda Ward – Secretary (Friends at the End)

Michelle Ballantyne MSP asked if all nominations are in agreement and requested proposers to reappoint all office bearers for the next year.

Patrick Harvie MSP proposes, George Adam MSP seconds.

Summary of work undertaken in the past year.

Michelle Ballantyne MSP noted that while the CPG has not met, lots of work has been going in the meantime and invited Amanda Ward of Friends at the End to comment.

Amanda updated the CPG AGM on key achievements as follows;

1. The first meeting of the year was scheduled for the 13th May which was cancelled due to COVID-19. This is the reason that the group has not met until now.
2. When emergency legislation was put forward as part of the COVID-19 crisis, Michelle Ballantyne MSP had private conversations with other MSP's about incorporating Advance Directives into this legislation. This was not picked up at the time but in Amanda Ward's role at the Law Society she has worked with Adrian Ward and they are in discussion with John Scott QC re his review of AWI legislation.
3. Friends at the End, Dignity in Dying and Humanist Society Scotland formed a coalition to take forward the next bill. The first piece of work by the coalition was joint polling. The results from this showed that 76% of those asked would like Scottish parliament to debate assisted dying after the elections. There was wide coverage of this in the media. Anybody who would like more information on this can contact Amanda Ward.
4. The campaign has now began briefing candidates for the May 2021 elections.
5. Amanda Ward chaired the World Federation of Right to Die Societies recent global event, hosted on World Right to Die Day. Here the work of the CPG was shared on an international stage and partnerships and connections have been made as a result.
6. The BMA surveyed their members on Assisted Dying. Campaign groups had campaigned for this exercise to be undertaken for some time. The results showed a majority within the BMA for the law to be reformed on assisted dying. While a majority showed support for assisted dying, approximately 30% said that they would not be willing to take part themselves - this is important feedback which can be implemented with the next bill re the importance of contentious objection.
7. There is a legal challenge against the RCGP. In 2019 they conducted a survey of their members which also showed a majority support for them to change their position on assisted dying from opposition to neutrality. Despite the results of the poll, they have not changed their stance and the bid is ongoing to change this.
8. As a group, various consultations have been responded to including the Social Security bill in regard to terminal illness criteria.
9. New Zealand held a referendum and legalised both euthanasia and assisted dying last month. Legislation is also being considered in Ireland and the Isle of Man.

Michelle Ballantyne MSP thanked Amanda for this update and noted that a lot has been done even though the CPG itself has not been meeting.

Approval of minutes - CPG on 10th sept 2019.

There were no challenges or amendments.

Proposed by Patrick Harvie MSP, seconded by Stacy Adam.

Any other Business

Stacey Adam asked a follow up question about the BMA survey, and how many of their members took part in it. Amanda confirmed that approximately twenty thousand people took part, which is approximately 20% of their membership.

Michelle Ballantyne MSP added that while this appears low, the result is significant and that their RCGP turnout was much lower by comparison.

The Convener thanked everybody in attendance and closed the formal business of the AGM.

The floor was then opened to questions for today's speakers.