7. Medication protocol development

Project summary

What is the project?

This project will identify best practice voluntary assisted dying substances and develop medication protocols.

What is the project goal?

To develop a safe and effective substance for use in voluntary assisted dying based on evidence and formulate best practice dosage guidelines to assist medical practitioners who choose to participate in voluntary assisted dying.

Why is it important?

In the majority of cases of voluntary assisted dying a medical practitioner will prescribe a voluntary assisted dying substance to a person who will then take it without further assistance. It is therefore critical to the implementation of voluntary assisted dying that suitable substances are formulated and available in Victoria which may lawfully be prescribed by a medical practitioner, and supplied and possessed by the person, in a form and dose that may be used to end their life.

A key recommendation of the Ministerial Advisory Panel in relation to the implementation of voluntary assisted dying was that the Taskforce engage a university pharmacy department to undertake research on the identification and development of best practice medications for use in voluntary assisted dying, including formulations, dosages and clinical and patient information and guidelines.

To ensure best practice substances are available for use in voluntary assisted dying the Taskforce will oversee work that will:

- Develop best practice formulations using substances currently available for use;
- Review existing dispensing programs to develop an appropriate approach for prescribing medical practitioners and pharmacists.

This project will focus on the available options for voluntary assisted dying substances, the development of appropriate and stable quality formulations, dosage guidelines and clinical and consumer information to support best practice in prescribing, dispensing and using substances for voluntary assisted dying.

Consideration will need to be given to ensuring that dosage guidelines and clinical and patient information remain up-to-date and reflect best practice into the future.

The Department of Health and Human Services will establish a permit application and approval process for the voluntary assisted dying substance in accordance with the Act. Options for enabling legal access to pentobarbitone or quinalbarbitone for use in voluntary assisted dying will be explored by the Department's Drugs and Poisons Regulation Unit in liaison with the Therapeutic Goods Administration.

How will the project achieve its goal?

The Taskforce will engage a pharmacy department to undertake research into best practice medications for use in voluntary assisted dying in Victoria. There will be particular focus on developing a safe and effective substance for use in self-administration.

The Taskforce will also work closely with pharmacy and peak pharmacy bodies to provide guidance and clarity around who will be able to dispense the voluntary assisted dying substance.

How will the project be organised?

The project will be auspiced by the Taskforce. A project working group will work in collaboration with a pharmacy department, clinicians, pharmacists and professional and consumer bodies.

Who are the main stakeholders?

Medical practitioners, health services, peak pharmacy bodies, pharmacists, the Therapeutic Goods Administration, the Department of Health and Human Services.

What are the project outcomes?

- Best practice formulations are identified for use in voluntary assisted dying.
- Formulation and dosage guidelines are developed for the voluntary assisted dying substance.
- Clinical and patient information and guidelines are developed to support the safe prescription and use of the voluntary assisted dying substance.
- A dissemination strategy for the guidelines and information is developed.
- A review process to ensure guidelines and information remain up-to-date is in place.