

# Compassion & Choices of Northern California Newsletter

Spring 2010



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compassionandchoicesnca.org



## COACH to Organize C&C Month

The Passages Luncheon last November was a winner in every way and happily, enough enthusiasm from the event led to the formation of a small auxiliary group of interested women who call themselves “COACH” – **CO**mpassion **And** **CH**oices. The Passages attendance was packed to bursting (we even had a waiting list) with more than 200 men and women at the St. Francis Yacht Club, dining with friends, and learning about Compassion & Choices.

KGO Radio’s dynamic talk show host Ray Taliaferro introduced the showing of a film about an articulate business woman, who, with encouragement from her two grown sons, chose to hasten her death rather than suffer prolonged and severe pain due to a terminal illness.

Emcee Ray then introduced our panel that featured Northern California Chapter Board Co-Chair Stewart Florsheim, who moderated the discussion with panelists Board Co-Chair Jordan Posamentier, Esq., client advocate Carole van Aelstyn, and board member Dr. Robert Brody. Although the panelists were limited to a five minute introduction, they managed to interest, educate, and stimulate the audience and answer the

## Hiring An Executive Director

The northern California chapter has decided to hire an executive director, who will be responsible for managing the day-to-day operations including creating and monitoring short and long-term objectives, local fundraising, and community outreach. “I am very excited about this position because the individual will help us make more inroads in northern California,” says Stewart Florsheim, Co-Chair of the Board of Directors. “We have so many opportunities to advance the cause, but we haven’t been able to take advantage of them.”

The individual will work closely with the National organization to present a unified vision for Northern California. Qualifications include five years’ experience as an executive director of a non-profit, preferably in a health-related field, and a strong personal commitment to the Death with Dignity movement. The job description can be found on our Web site at: [www.compassionandchoicesnca.org](http://www.compassionandchoicesnca.org) and for more information, please e-mail: [admin@compassionandchoicesnca.org](mailto:admin@compassionandchoicesnca.org).

## Compassion & Choices Month

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audience's thoughtful questions. Event Co-Chairs JaMel Perkins and Merla Zellerbach wrapped up the event with a few final words.

Since the event was billed as an "awareness-raiser" rather than fundraiser, the emphasis was not on raising money. Nevertheless, some guests were generous enough to make four-figure donations which were deeply appreciated. Also, the formation of an auxiliary group was an added benefit from the luncheon.

Northern California Chapter board member and COACH's Pat Dodson is looking for volunteers to help plan an event in October, which will consist of a series of small events. October is Compassion & Choices month, and COACH's focus will be on inspiring and

coordinating small private gatherings in homes around the Bay Area. COACH will supply a speaker, well-versed on what we do, and most likely a hospice worker who tells case histories in a positive and entertaining way.

The mood will be upbeat, and the emphasis, once again, on spreading awareness rather than fundraising. We will also make sure each speaker brings literature and forms for completing advance directives.

If you would like more information about hosting a small get-together in your home, please contact Pat at [patdodson@pacbell.net](mailto:patdodson@pacbell.net). And, if you have friends curious about the cause, please spread the word about Compassion & Choices, and by the way, would they like to host a gathering?

### High School Writing Contest

Compassion & Choices of Northern California is in its third year of hosting *The Matters of Life & Death Scholarship Writing Contest*. Aid-in-dying affects all generations, so what better way to prepare the younger generation in understanding this difficult issue than to develop their awareness through friendly competition?

This year's prompt is: *Why should California pass a law to establish aid-in-dying for terminally ill patients who are suffering at the end of their lives?* College-bound California high school students in grades 11 and 12 are invited to write up to 1,000 words in response, and submit their entries by June 1. This year, we are helping prepare prospective entrants by providing Compassion & Choices' "Students' Guide to Aid-in-Dying." For complete rules for the contest, and to download the guide, please visit: [www.compassionandchoicesnca.org](http://www.compassionandchoicesnca.org).

We will announce the winners and post their entries on our Web site by late June. The first place winner will receive \$1000, second place, \$500, and third place, \$250. Special thanks to board member, Pat Dodson, for generously offering to sponsor the first place prize.

### Northern California Board Welcomes New Members

The Northern California Board of Directors is pleased to announce three new board members: **Pat Dodson**, **Rebecca Forest**, and **Sandra McIntyre**. For more information, and to learn about Pat, Sandra, and Rebecca's background, visit our Web site at [www.compassionandchoicesnca.org](http://www.compassionandchoicesnca.org), and click on the *Who We Are* page.

The Board also wants to thank Reverend John Brooke, Patricia Knight, and Elinor Mills for serving on the board, and for agreeing to continue to serve our organization by joining the Advisory Council.



Board Members from left: Co-Chair Jordan Posamentier, Esq., Carole van Aelstyn, Outreach Coordinator Christina Goodwin, Fran Johns, Dr. Bob Liner, Dr. Bob Brody, Merla Zellerbach, Co-Chair Stewart Florsheim, Debra Kay, Sandra McIntyre, Amy Hittner, Pat Dodson, Sue Steele, and Rebecca Forest.

## National Aid-in-Dying News

While C&C in California continues to investigate new paths to raise awareness about end-of-life care and choices, other states have been moving ahead on the legal front:

- At the start of the new year, **Montana** became the third state to protect the practice of aid-in-dying within its borders. Montana's Supreme Court upheld a trial court's ruling that a physician may not be prosecuted under their state's homicide statutes for prescribing terminally ill patients life-ending medicine. Now, the problem in Montana has shifted from one of legality to one of practicality. Compassion & Choices is working hard to locate willing physicians and to publicize to Montanans that aid-in-dying is lawful and available in their state. As of March, Compassion & Choices has three clients. And as of early April, at least one terminally ill Montanan chose to hasten death by taking life-ending medication.

- Does **Connecticut's** crime of assisted suicide reach the conduct of a physician providing aid-in-dying to a terminally ill, mentally competent adult? This is the question at the base of *Blick v. Connecticut*, a case spearheaded by Compassion & Choices. Compassion & Choices' will argue, as it has over the years, that "suicide" is an act of violence, always accompanied with mental illness, and as such is not an appropriate term for a patient who chooses aid-in-dying. Properly, aid-in-dying aims to be peaceful and reasoned. It is a choice by a mentally competent adult to die when her or his terminal illness becomes too difficult to bear. It is not a question of whether the patient will die, but of how. We will also point out that Oregon and Washington's death with dignity laws never use the term "assisted suicide," and further notice that Connecticut's crime of assisted suicide was never intended to reach physician aid-in-dying. It is our goal for the court in *Blick v. Connecticut* to explicitly exempt aid-in-dying from Connecticut's assisted suicide statutes. If Compassion & Choices is successful, *Blick* could pave the way for similar clarifications in other jurisdictions, including perhaps California.

- Early statistics are in for **Washington**: 63 received life-ending medication in the first nine months of Washington State's new death with dignity law, passed at the end of 2008. Of those 63 people, 36 died taking the medicine, and 11 died without taking it. The remaining 16 are alive as of early April.

## "Old Age is not for Sissies"

*Constance Woulf, a retired high school English teacher, is a Compassion and Choices client, coping with a progressive neuron disease. She finds comfort in writing poetry, and being the object of devotion from Pixie, her dog and constant companion.*

When my brother first shared this saying with me I felt its truth at once.

"Old age is not for sissies."

How true, how true

The mind remains keen and alert,

Ruthlessly noting the body's decline.

Actions which used to be effortless

Nearly automatic, now require concentrated effort.

Pulling on a shirt. Getting up from the couch.

I get so angry at my no-longer-responsive body.

Why can't it perform as it used to?

"Old age is not for sissies."

*Constance Woulf*

## End-of-Life Volunteer Training

Compassion & Choices of Northern California is providing a two-day volunteer training in San Francisco this July 9-10. The training, hosted by the End-of-Life Consultation Program staff, is open to those interested and committed to helping Compassion & Choices' clients. At the training, screened participants will receive information about the consultation program, including guidelines and procedures for counseling terminally ill people who are considering end-of-life choices.

Volunteers are required to sign a confidentiality form; and once trained, will need to attend monthly team conference calls and be available to visit or phone an assigned client on an ongoing basis. Those interested in being a volunteer counselor can call the Denver office at: (800) 247-7421, and ask to speak to Jennifer McClellan, our volunteer coordinator who can provide more information about the training, and send you a volunteer application. Jen can also be reached via email at: [jmclellan@compassionandchoices.org](mailto:jmclellan@compassionandchoices.org).



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## Informational Aid-in-Dying Meetings Held Throughout Bay Area

In recent months, Northern California Chapter board members and volunteers held several informational meetings in the Bay Area on topics including the history of the aid-in-dying movement, end-of-life planning, and even a moot court discussion of Oregon's Death with Dignity Act.

Board members Fran Johns and Sue Steele met with residents of The Redwoods, in Mill Valley, on March 11 and it was such a success, they plan to develop an ongoing series there. Future meeting topics will include a showing of the "Fran Ravel Farewell" film, discussion on the legal aspects of aid-in-dying, and as always, opportunities for questions and answers.

Board member Dr. Bob Liner met with the Advanced Business Law Class at University of California,

Merced on February 9 to participate in a moot court discussion of the US Supreme Court case *Gonzales v. Oregon* (in which the attorney general attempted to circumvent Oregon's Death with Dignity Act by prosecuting doctors for what he perceived as a violation of the Controlled Substances Act). Dr. Liner then spoke to the class on aid-in-dying and answered questions.



Representatives from Compassion & Choices are available to speak throughout the Bay Area on all aspects of aid-in-dying.

The Chapter is organizing informational meetings in Palo Alto, Berkeley, Tiburon, and Santa Rosa. If you are interested in attending one of these or would like to suggest a meeting in your community, please contact Outreach Coordinator Christina Goodwin at (866) 825-8967 or send in the enclosed envelope expressing your interest. You may also stay informed of our event happenings at [www.compassionandchoicesnca.org](http://www.compassionandchoicesnca.org).