Submission to the Senate Committee on Palliative Care in Australia.

15th Feb 2012

Dear Sirs/ Madams,

I have written to Parliamentarians many times on the issue of Palliative care and it's link with the euthanasia debate.

Today very briefly I want to address this from my personal background – when my Mum was dying.

At this time we were offered Palliative care. I had no idea what this would involve and was cautious.

My Mum was dying of cancer and had been sick for years. She didn't want to go to hospital to die and she was very aware of her condition.

The Palliative care team who came to Mum & Dad's home worked wonderfully in conjunction with the District Nurses and the doctor.

Our experience of the team was of feeling great relief to have some professional help.

Mum was offered pain relief that was neither too much or too little. She & the family were offered all the options available for in home care and any help required to meet the options. Nothing was too much. We were counselled & talked through the many aspects of caring for Mum. She was on oxygen and had morphine for pain. Dressings needed to be done regularly. If we didn't know how to do something or needed support we only had to call. The nice thing was that we were not swamped by the professionals. They assisted us to do the caring as we the family desired.

Some well meaning people advised us not to try to care for Mum at home but the Palliative Care team gave us the encouragement & support we needed. At no time did we feel overwhelmed or alone.

In our case Mum's pain was managed very well and we can really attest to a "good death". I would never have used that term before.

In the time we had left with Mum we could run the home as she wanted things to be. Visitors & family could come & go. We had home baked goodies & food coming from her kitchen making the home smell lovely and lived in. This was also important for Dad and my little brother who lived at home. Medical needs etc were all done in conjunction with the team, the doctor and the nurses.

Mum died peacefully at home surrounded by her loving family. The Palliative care team & district nurses asked us if we would like to wash Mum down & lay her out or whether we wanted them to do it. We decided to do this ourselves – my Dad & I. The nurses sat nearby quietly ready to lend a hand or advise.

They helped us achieve our goal of a very dignified and peaceful death.

Good Palliative Care is a very necessary part of our Medical system. Our experience highlights the benefits to both the client and the family, also the benefit of not needing expensive hospitalisation.

I would urge Government to ensure adequate budgeting for extensive Palliative care services throughout all major regions of Australia.