

Implementing VAD legislation

An Epworth perspective

Presented by:

Suzie Hooper & Eliza Armstrong



100
YEARS OF CARE
1920-2020



How did Epworth respond?

- > September 2018 – Epworth Voluntary Assisted Dying WG established
- > Membership included a broad range of disciplines and representatives from each Epworth division
- > Epworth Board agreed that a service would be available to Epworth patients
- > Service to be available for Epworth patients from July 2019 when the Act came into force
- > Identified the need for an Epworth VAD Coordinator
- > Provision of support for the provision of VAD at Epworth commenced on July 1st 2019

A model built on Epworth values

Integrity

- > Board and executive commitment from the beginning to support process
- > Keeping everyone informed

Respect

- > Conscientious objectors acknowledged and considered
- > Staff and doctor preference
- > Patient and family choice
- > Strong collaboration with palliative care

Community

- > Meet expectations based on the law
- > Local support teams

Accountability

- > Voluntary Assisted Dying Coordinator
- > Policies, protocols and system in place
- > Conversation pathways

Compassion

- > Provide patients and their families with the ability to die with dignity at a time of their choosing
- > Staff and doctor debrief process

Excellence

- > Epworth model considered best practice in Victoria



Began with the Epworth Board



- The Epworth Board agreed in December 2018 that Epworth should support Epworth patients requesting information and assistance with accessing voluntary assisted dying in accordance with the Act
- The precise nature of the support that Epworth was going to provide had to be considered and depended on a range of factors
- Established an Epworth VAD Working Group reporting to the Board and CMO
- Epworth Board released a position statement to provide clarity to the entire organisation

Understanding obligations under the Act

- Health services do not have the option of being indifferent to the voluntary assisted dying legislation – cannot just ‘opt out’
- It is important to ensure that there is a process in place to handle patient inquiries about voluntary assisted dying so that both patients, their families and staff are supported
- The provision of information to staff must be carefully developed and managed to ensure consistency
- Conscientious objection

Initial work

- Monthly VAD Working Group meetings
- VAD Local Support Teams at each site
- Site based stakeholder engagement and education by WG Chair and Senior Clinical Lead (DCS)
- Appointment of Group-wide VAD Coordinator including job description

What worked well

- Worked closely with Senior Clinical Lead for one month prior to commencement of legislation
- VAD Coordinator sees all inpatients and outpatients referred
- VAD Protocol developed
- Conversation Pathways
- Local Support Teams
- Orientation day for local support team members across the group
- Data Base
- Epworth VAD Brochure

VAD Coordinator Role

- Liaising with the patient and their family
- Working with the VAD Coordinating Medical Officer for best patient outcome
- Providing additional support for doctors on the day of patient's death (e.g. medication, follow-up)
- Liaising with Statewide Pharmacy from The Alfred
- Ensuring local support member is available when patient medication is delivered

VAD Coordinator Role

- Liaison with local support team: future cases for planning
- Statewide care navigators - referrals
- Participate in Community of Practice
- Local executive - keep informed
- Delegating referrals to local support team
- Pastoral care - refer to pastoral care for patient and staff
- Liaison with VAD Board

VAD Protocol – elements

- Process overview
- Responding to requests
- Assessment and reviews
- Permit
- Inpatients with a permit
- Storage and management of VAD medication
- Disposal of excess medication
- Notifications following death
- Support (State-wide Care Navigators)
- Conscientious Objection
- Staff assistance

Outcome

Epworth staff and doctors understand where to source detailed information about voluntary assisted dying and their legislative obligations.

Epworth staff and doctors understand how to manage requests for information about voluntary assisted dying.

Epworth staff and doctors understand the process for Epworth patients who wish to access voluntary assisted dying.

The values and beliefs of staff and doctors who are conscientious objectors to voluntary assisted dying are respected and the autonomy, privacy and dignity of the patient is protected.

Conversation Pathways

Voluntary Assisted Dying Staff Conversation Pathways



1. If a patient requests information about VAD

Patient asks clinical staff member:

"I am dying and I want to know about voluntary assisted dying."

or

"I have heard that you can help people die now. Can you tell me about this and how Epworth can help me?"

or

"I am in so much pain and losing my dignity, please help me to end it now with these medications I have heard you can take."

Staff member not a conscientious objector

"You can speak to your doctor about this."

and/or

"To ensure you get the right information about this, I will get one of our support team members to come and speak to you."

Staff member is a conscientious objector

"If you have any questions about your care, you should speak to your doctor."

and/or

"I will get one of our local support team members to come and speak to you."

Inform treating doctor that request has been received

and

Contact local VAD support team member and provide patient details for follow up

Hospital Coordinator
Epworth Richmond
9426 8599 | 0408 552 779
ER-NursingCoordinators@epworth.org.au

and

Contact the VAD Coordinator on **0428 319 652** or **VADcoordinator@epworth.org.au** (note this is not a 24 hour service).

Voluntary Assisted Dying Staff Conversation Pathways



2. If a family member or carer requests information about VAD

Family member or carer asks clinical staff member:

"I think my mum is dying and I want to know about voluntary assisted dying."

or

"I have heard that you can help people die now. Can you tell me about this and how Epworth can help my father?"

or

"My sister is in so much pain and losing her dignity, I know she doesn't want this. Please give me some information about these medications I have heard people can take."

Staff member not a conscientious objector

"You can speak to your relative's treating doctor about their care."

and/or

"I can refer you to our local support team who can provide you with more information."

Staff member is a conscientious objector

"You should speak to your relative's treating doctor about their care."

and/or

"I can refer you to our support team who can explain this more clearly to you."

Inform treating doctor that request has been received

and

Contact local VAD support team member to come and speak to the family member and patient if required

Hospital Coordinator
Epworth Richmond
9426 8599 | 0408 552 779
ER-NursingCoordinators@epworth.org.au

and

Contact the VAD Coordinator on **0428 319 652** or **VADcoordinator@epworth.org.au** (note this is not a 24 hour service).

Conversation Pathways

Voluntary Assisted Dying Staff Conversation Pathways



3. If you're a manager approached by a staff member on behalf of a patient

Staff member approaches their manager with questions. A patient has asked them about VAD:

"A patient just asked me about voluntary assisted dying and I don't know what to say to them."

or

"A patient has asked me about voluntary assisted dying but I don't believe in that. I am not going to tell them anything."

or

"A patient's sister just asked me about voluntary assisted dying and I don't think I am allowed to tell them anything".

Manager **not** a conscientious objector

"Epworth has developed conversation pathways to help with this. I will show them to you."

and

"We have a local voluntary assisted dying support team that you can speak to, if you would like."

Manager **is** a conscientious objector

"Epworth has developed conversation pathways to help with this. I will show them to you."

and/or

"We have an Epworth voluntary assisted dying support person that you can speak to, if you would like that."

Contact:

Local VAD support team member and provide patient details for follow up

Hospital Coordinator
Epworth Richmond
9426 8599 | 0408 552 779
ER-NursingCoordinators@epworth.org.au

and

Contact the VAD Coordinator on 0428 319 652 or VADcoordinator@epworth.org.au (note this is not a 24 hour service).

Voluntary Assisted Dying Staff Conversation Pathways



4. If you're advised by a patient they have a VAD permit and medication box with them

A patient states:

"I have a permit for VAD medication and I have the box in my bag. I want to keep the medication with me so I can use it when I am ready."

or

"I have a permit for VAD and the medication is at home. I am going to ask my wife to bring it in so I can use it when I am ready."

Staff member **not** a conscientious objector

"Thank you for letting me know. Epworth protocol states that we would prefer you send it home but otherwise it can be stored here in your medication drawer."

and

"We have a local support team who can advise you. I will ask them to meet with you."

Staff member **is** a conscientious objector

"Thank you for letting me know. You can speak to your treating doctor about your care."

and/or

"I can refer you to our support team who can explain our protocols to you."

Inform treating doctor that request has been received

and

Contact local VAD support team and provide patient details for follow up

Hospital Coordinator
Epworth Richmond
9426 8599 | 0408 552 779
ER-NursingCoordinators@epworth.org.au

and

Contact the VAD Coordinator on 0428 319 652 or VADcoordinator@epworth.org.au (note this is not a 24 hour service).

Local Support Teams

- Local, trusted resource for all information and support
- Reduces risk of incorrect information being shared by untrained staff in the clinical areas
- Limits access to sensitive information
- Training PRIOR to first case vital
- All trained by the VAD Coordinator and Senior Clinical Lead – consistency of information
- Multidisciplinary where possible
- Onsite team education prior to cases – builds capacity and reduces burnout

Orientation Day for Local Support Teams



Workshop program

1400	Welcome and Introduction	Suzie Hooper
1405	The role of the Voluntary Assisted Dying Care Navigator VAD and Conscientious Objection	Melanie Van Diemen
1445	Using Conversation Pathways	Eliza Armstrong
1500	Afternoon Tea	
1515	Role of the medical practitioners and how a permit is issued	Dr Luis Prado
1540	Voluntary Assisted Dying Medication and the role of the Statewide Pharmacy	Prof Michael Dooley
1600	Resources and local Epworth arrangements	Suzie Hooper
1615	Close	

Data base

- Data base established prior to commencement of provision of VAD
- Managed by VAD coordinator
- Accessible by all local support team members
- All referrals and interactions by VAD team are recorded for entire patient journey
- Expectation is that it is completed within 24 hours of each referral
- Confidentially paramount

Epworth VAD Brochure



End of life support

Epworth doctors, nurses, pastoral care workers and social workers are on hand to support and advise our patients considering end of life decisions. Feel free to contact them through your treating doctor or nurse.

Some of our doctors and staff may conscientiously object to voluntary assisted dying and are not required to participate or assist. If you raise the matter with them, they may refer you to another doctor or staff member or to our local support team.

Thinking about or discussing end of life care, including voluntary assisted dying, may make you feel distressed or sad. If you feel you require support or guidance, our social workers, psychologists and pastoral care practitioners are available to you and your family or carer. If you would like to meet with one of the team, ask your nurse to contact them.

Acknowledgements

This document has drawn on publicly available information from the Victorian Government and the Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017.

health.vic.gov.au

Contact us

Voluntary Assisted Dying Coordinator
Phone 0428 319 652
Email VADcoordinator@epworth.org.au

epworth.org.au

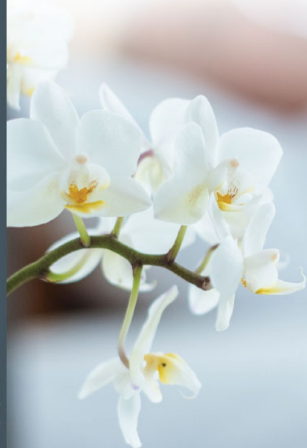


PHOTO: JEFFREY GARDNER



Epworth HealthCare

Voluntary assisted dying For Epworth patients upon request



Voluntary assisted dying

The Victorian Voluntary Assisted Dying Act 2017 came into effect on 19 June 2019. This new law permits someone who is at the late stage of an advanced disease, who meets specific criteria, to take medication prescribed by an approved doctor. This will allow them to die at a time of their choosing.

Epworth believes the needs and choices of every patient matters. We are committed to offering help with respect and compassion, in line with our values.

Epworth will provide appropriate care and support for patients who request information and assistance about voluntary assisted dying.

Epworth also provides palliative care, social work support and pastoral care; all of which can improve the quality of life and provide comfort near the end of life. Family and carers can also access these services.

Even with the best care, someone with a terminal disease who is approaching the end of their life and experiencing suffering may want to access voluntary assisted dying. Under the new Victorian law some of these patients now have the option of controlling the timing and manner of their death.

Epworth and you

If you wish to talk about voluntary assisted dying, we will listen with empathy, provide information with integrity and offer options with compassion.

In accordance with the law, only you – the patient – can start a conversation about voluntary assisted dying with your GP, specialist doctor, nurse or health practitioner. Clinical staff cannot talk about it unless you raise the subject.

If you are an Epworth patient, let your doctor, nurse or health practitioner know if you want to talk about voluntary assisted dying. We will arrange a time for you to meet and discuss options with our local support team. You will then need to raise the matter yourself with the person who visits you.

Asking for information

Asking for information does not mean you need to start the process of requesting voluntary assisted dying. That first discussion will just give you some information to consider – when and if you are ready.

We recommend you read the special information booklet developed with the community by the Victorian Government – *Voluntary assisted dying: Information for people considering voluntary assisted dying*. This will answer many questions you may have.

You can find this booklet at health.vic.gov.au (search for 'voluntary assisted dying').

Epworth has also appointed a coordinator to provide information and support to patients and their families, as well as to doctors and staff. You can contact our Voluntary Assisted Dying Coordinator at VADcoordinator@epworth.org.au or phone 0428 319 652.

Decisions around end of life choices are intensely personal. Epworth provides support for patients who request information about accessing voluntary assisted dying with understanding and compassion.

Do differently

- Early engagement with Palliative Care Teams
- Size of the Local Support Team matches the need – reduce risk of burnout
- More shift workers in VAD support role
- Include psychologists in local support team
- Ensure Pastoral Care is integral to the team
- DHHS patient guide for VAD – long and complex - patients and families find it had to absorb all the information
- Limited information from Statewide Care Navigators – developed Epworth referral

Epworth VAD patient information brochure

7. Permit to prescribe

The coordinating medical practitioner will apply for a permit to prescribe the medication. This process can take up to three days.

8. Receiving the medication

Once approved, the coordinating medical practitioner will write a prescription for the voluntary assisted dying medication and provide this to the state-wide pharmacy service.

8a. Self-administered medication

If you choose to access the medication that you take yourself, you will need to contact the state-wide pharmacy service to arrange delivery on 03 9076 5270. The medication will be delivered directly to you at home or hospital.

8b. Intravenous medication

In some cases, if you are assessed as being unable to take medication by yourself, the medication may be given to you intravenously, by a doctor.

The medication will be delivered directly to the doctor and they will be responsible for bringing it to the hospital at the agreed time.

Finding doctors to assist with the assessment

Only senior doctors who have completed extra training in voluntary assisted dying can be the coordinating or consulting medical practitioner.

At least one of these doctors needs to be a specialist in your medical condition.

Your current specialist doctor (such as your oncologist or neurologist) and/or your general practitioner (GP) might be accredited as a voluntary assisted dying doctor.

Your current doctors or Epworth's voluntary assisted dying coordinator can help find a suitable doctor who is willing to provide an assessment for you, if you need it.



Contact us
Voluntary Assisted Dying Coordinator
Phone 0428 319 652
Email VADcoordinator@epworth.org.au

epworth.org.au



PHOTO: AP/ISTOCK.COM

Epworth HealthCare



Voluntary Assisted Dying Information to help understand and guide you through the process

Victoria's voluntary assisted dying law allows a person who is at the late stages of advanced disease to take a medication prescribed by a doctor that will bring about their death at a time they choose.

Access to this follows a legal process that has many steps which can take at least two to three weeks to complete. This is to make sure the choice is well-considered.

Voluntary assisted dying coordinator

Epworth has a voluntary assisted dying coordinator who can help you with the process. The voluntary assisted dying coordinator:

- > can help find a doctor who is willing to provide an assessment for you, if you need it.
- > can help to find suitable witnesses on your behalf, if needed.
- > will communicate with everyone involved to keep them informed. (This includes you, your doctors and the state-wide pharmacy service.)
- > will provide regular updates to you as you go through the process.

Contact details

Eliza Armstrong
Voluntary Assisted Dying Coordinator
Epworth HealthCare
Phone: 0428 319 652
Email: VADcoordinator@epworth.org.au

The process to access voluntary assisted dying

1. Prepare documents as evidence

As part of the assessment process, you will need to provide evidence that you are:

- > over 18 years of age
- > an Australian citizen or permanent resident
- > a Victorian resident for over 12 months.

The voluntary assisted dying coordinator will provide you with a list of the documents you need to get copies of.

2. First request

If you decide you want to access voluntary assisted dying, ask your doctor to help you access it. Tell them that you want to go through the steps that will allow you to access voluntary assisted dying. (This is the first request.)

This request needs to come from you first. By law, they are not allowed to start this conversation.

If your doctor has not completed the required training for voluntary assisted dying they will refer you to someone who has. This doctor will be your coordinating medical practitioner and complete your first assessment.

3. First assessment by the coordinating medical practitioner

The coordinating medical practitioner will assess you to see if you are eligible for voluntary assisted dying.

If you are eligible, they will start the paperwork needed to continue the process. (This is the first assessment.)

4. Second assessment by the consulting medical practitioner

You will see a second doctor who will also assess you to confirm that you are eligible for voluntary assisted dying. (This is the second assessment.)

5. Appoint two witnesses and a contact person to take to your second and final request

At your next appointment you will need to have two witnesses and a contact person with you.

The witnesses are there to observe you make your second and final request.

The witnesses cannot be beneficiaries of the will. Dying with Dignity can assist with witnesses if needed. The contact person will be responsible for returning unused medication to the pharmacy if you die before taking the medication, or decide not to take it.

6. Second and final request with the coordinating medical practitioner

At least nine days (including weekends) after the first request, you will need to see the coordinating medical practitioner again to make your second and final request to help you access voluntary assisted dying.

You will be asked to sign a form requesting for the coordinating medical practitioner help you access voluntary assisted dying medication. (This is the second request.)

You and your contact person will be asked to complete a Contact Person Appointment Form in the presence of the coordinating medical practitioner.

You will need to make one final verbal request to access voluntary assisted dying to your coordinating medical practitioner. (This is the final request.)

Achievements



- > Groupwide VAD coordinator role continues.
- > All local support teams trained.
- > Nursing led oral VAD medication administration.
- > Epworth Groupwide VAD coordinator and local support team members active in the community of practice.
- > Assisting Western Australia with implementation of VAD from 1 July 2021.
- > Strengthening the ties with Dying with Dignity.
- > Implementing a pandemic plan with VAD support teams.

VAD Board Recommendations

- > Time frame from the first request to the final declaration needs to be reduced from 9 days.
- > Telehealth should be considered as an witness option for the final declaration. Particularly relevant in this pandemic time and for remote and regional patients.
- > Encourage local VAD support teams at all hospitals to assist and support patients through their VAD journey.
- > More bereavement information and specialised support for families whose loved one has been through the VAD process.

Thank you

