



# VADANZ

Voluntary Assisted Dying Australia and New Zealand

Dear <<First Name>>

I am honoured to be writing to you for the first time as President of VADANZ for 2024-5. I have big shoes to fill! I'd like to acknowledge **Dr Cam McLaren**, our founding President, who retired at last month's Annual General Meeting and did so much work to get VADANZ up and running.

We held our first VADANZ AGM on Sunday October 27 in Brisbane, in the lead up to the Trans-Tasman Voluntary Assisted Dying Conference, where **Acting Chair Ray Plibersek** presented our first Annual Report. We also announced **President-Elect, Dr Andrea Bendrups**.

The conference was inspirational. So many like-minded, passionate people from both sides of the Tasman. It was wonderful to see more than half of the VADANZ membership attended, demonstrating our collective desire to network and learn from one another. It was great to meet so many of you!

It was noted that VAD practitioners often work in isolation and there were presentations highlighting the importance of practitioner self care. Debriefing mechanisms are important, both formal and informal. We encourage you to be part of the community of practice in your jurisdiction.

I found it heartening to listen to the impressive medical student talks and know we have a new generation of health professionals interested in VAD practice. I plan to take a recommendation to the VADANZ board to consider a new student membership category.

I look forward to the next 12 months as President helping VADANZ build on our advocacy and education program to support members, facilitate learning opportunities and, most importantly, improve VAD care for all.



**Dr Sally Cockburn | VADANZ President**



### **VADCON24 - we want to hear from you**

Thanks to those who attended a jam-packed two days in Brisbane, and a big shout out to Conference co-host Go Gentle Australia and partner Australian Centre for Health Law Research, QUT, for a stimulating and thought-provoking program of research presentations and panel discussions.

We are now busy collecting feedback to see how we can do it even better! This includes looking at ways to bring more clinical content to the next conference (date and venue still under discussion).

If you haven't submitted your VADCON24 feedback yet, click below.



### **VADANZ Annual General Meeting**

On Sunday 27 October we held the inaugural AGM of VADANZ where we were able to:

- Update members on the operations of the company
- Table and approve both the Annual Report for our first period and the Constitution of the company.
- Welcome new directors: Dr Sally Cockburn (President), Dr Andrea Bendrups (President-Elect), Ray Plibersek (Acting Chair); Susan Jury, Prof Michael Dooley, Dr Clare Fellingham, Dr Laura Chapman, Dr Keith McArthur, Dr Chloe Furst (Board Members).

The Annual Report, minutes of the meeting and further information will be available in December to members.

### **Meet the VADANZ board**

This month, we meet new VADANZ board member Dr Clare Fellingham, consultant anaesthetist, and VAD Clinical Lead East Metro Health Service, WA.

#### **How did you come to be practising VAD?**

More by accident than design! I've always been fascinated by the great transcendental moments of human existence (birth and death) and had my sights set on being both an obstetric anaesthetist and palliative care physician. However, I did my pall care fellowship when VAD was being debated in WA and I was stunned by the opposition and the perceived incongruence with other forms of supportive EoL care. When my organisation put out an EOI for a VAD clinical lead to guide and shape service delivery ahead of the law enactment I applied, and it's fair to say that implementing VAD has changed the entire trajectory of my life and career. I was one of the first VAD practitioners in WA and VAD is without a doubt the most meaningful and rewarding work I have done in my entire medical career.

both an operational (service design and implementation) and clinical (3+ years of work as a high-volume VAD practitioner) perspective, combined with a deeply held conviction in ethical decision making (I am currently studying for a Master of Bioethics through Monash) and a determination to champion patient-centred and directed care. I also love a good conversation and don't shy away from difficult subjects, so I hope to offer strong and courageous advocacy through high level communication skills.



**Outside of work, what are we likely to find you**

**doing?** Chasing after my three kids, spending time in the outdoors (particularly the beach or forest), reading Stoic philosophy, cooking, singing and spending time with friends.



2024 VADANZ Webinar series

## Malignant prognostication for VAD

Time: 6.30pm AEDT, 8.30pm NZST  
Date: Wednesday 20 November, 2024

### Webinar series

- How do you approach prognostication when treatments *might* prolong life?
- What tools or resources can help with prognostication?
- What markers or specific changes should you be looking for that might indicate a <6/12 month prognosis?

Join us for a one-hour webinar on malignant prognostication to explore these issues and more.

The webinar will consist of a panel discussion and all VADANZ members are invited to attend this free event.

On the panel will be:

**Dr David Speakman**, a practicing clinician working in the Breast and Melanoma and Skin services at Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre, and in private practice. David was Peter Mac's Chief Medical Officer from 2013 to 2023.

**Dr Belinda Kiely**, a medical oncologist with over 15 years of clinical experience. She is a senior lecturer at the University of Sydney, with clinical appointments at Campbelltown Hospital and Concord hospitals.

The webinar will be hosted by **Dr David Shap** a GP from Victoria who has been a VAD practitioner since 2021. Many thanks to **Susan Jury** for leading the organisation of the 2024 webinar series.

### Register for the webinar on malignant prognostication



#### VADANZ Innovation Award winner

**Dr Jessica Young** is the winner of the inaugural [VADANZ Innovation Award for Emerging Research in Voluntary Assisted Dying](#) presented at the VADCON24 Conference dinner.

Jessica, a sociologist, and senior research fellow in the School of Health at Te Herenga Waka — Victoria University of Wellington has been building a program of research to continue investigating all aspects of assisted dying. She leads several projects including the first national study 'Exploring the early experiences of the assisted dying service in Aotearoa New Zealand'.

Jessica established and co-chairs the Assisted Dying Research Network and was a member of the statutory body Support and Consultation for End of Life NZ (SCENZ) Group.

She was [recently in the news with this report](#) on her research, into how people in NZ approved for VAD choose their time to die; a theme she also spoke about at VADCON24. Congratulations Jessica!



### World Watch

**UK** | The UK Terminally Ill Adults (End of Life) bill was published this month.

- 6 month timeframe to death
- Each application is subject to High Court approval
- Up to 14yrs in prison for coercion into assisted dying,
- Substance must be self-administered but can be prepared by the co-ordinating practitioner

Read a summary here: [Assisted dying bill: What is in proposed law?](#) And the full bill [here](#).

**US** | An amendment to the West Virginian constitution banning assisted dying is set to narrowly pass. [West Virginians approve amendment to prohibit physician-assisted deaths](#). West Virginians voted on the amendment this month alongside the election. Even though assisted dying is already illegal in the state, this is a further step that will make it difficult for a bill to be introduced in future.

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