

May 2020 Newsletter

Dear Members,

Once again I'd like to let you know what has been happening in the past two months.

First of all I want to do what everyone has probably expected, namely postpone the General Assembly scheduled for 4.6.20. Unfortunately, this and the event on 11/06/20 have become casualties of the Corona virus. We are postponing the event with the interesting panel discussion to next year. If at all possible, however, I would like to hold the General Assembly on **Wednesday, 5 August 2020**. Please save the date. You will receive an invitation and the necessary documents at the appropriate time.

The corona months have put us on pause too. In the past two months we assisted two Swiss citizens to end their lives; foreigners were not allowed to travel to Switzerland. All previously reserved dates had to be postponed, which will result in an extremely onerous period once the borders reopen. We may once again have to stop admitting new members if we are overwhelmed with requests for death and have too few available dates. We want to provide optimal service to all members who rely on our help, and remain a small, flexible organization. I hope you appreciate this. For now, admittance is still open.

The Construction Committee has granted permission for the Flüh project, but three parties are still pursuing their objections to our plans at cantonal level and, if necessary, probably before the Federal Court, too. This means the project will be at a standstill for a few more months, until Canton Solothurn has decided whether to dismiss the objections. It's a shame but "good things come to those who wait" and we're not giving up hope. Since Flüh isn't happening any time soon, we have signed an extension to our contract with the owner of the Liestal property.

There is no further news of my trial except that a deadline of mid-June has been set when we will hear from the cantonal court how and when it will proceed.

In March I attended the appeal hearing of Dr Pierre Beck at the cantonal court in Geneva. Unfortunately, the judgement went against him here, too. The cantonal court confirmed the decision that Pierre Beck breached his duty of care. Dr. Beck now has to appeal this decision in Federal Court. At this point I'd like to correct a mistake in the last newsletter: in Pierre Beck's case, it was the man who was very seriously ill. His wife was still quite spry at the age of 86 but, despite that, wanted to die with him. Dr. Beck asserted before the Cantonal Court that the woman would have faced unbearable suffering when her husband had died. The woman was not willing to endure being left alone at such a great age. She chose to end the life she had shared with her husband for over 60 years together with him. The court took absolutely no account of the effect on Dr Beck of a recent dramatic incident at Exit ADMD. I would like to explain briefly to help you understand. A few months ago another very elderly couple wanted assistance to die together; the woman, terminally ill with cancer, the man well over 80 years old but, as in the Beck case, still vigorous. The doctor who assessed their desire to die at the time decided that the gravely ill woman would be allowed to die using NAP barbiturate but that the man would have to wait as he was "not ill enough". The assisted death of the woman took place in their own home. After his wife had passed away peacefully, the man left the room. A few minutes later a shot was fired; the man had shot himself to join his wife in death. I wonder, as did Dr. Beck, is that civilised in a liberal country like Switzerland? And why should any doctor have to expect prosecution for respecting the wishes of a rational, determined person? I can only say I will support Dr Beck by attending the Federal Court, too.

Our members continue to show that they are ready to defend the right to a self-determined death. Here are the latest examples:

1. In Switzerland Dr Birkenstock, financed by the Swiss National Science Foundation, has launched a study entitled: "I decide when enough is enough". After a mailshot to all members, within two days more than 30 members had replied to participate in the study and express their opinion.
2. A Swiss journalist was looking for members who could not undergo their assisted deaths because the borders were closed during the corona crisis. I wrote to two members, a lady from Austria and one from Germany. Both were immediately willing to stand by their decision. Here is the link to that article: <https://www.bzbasel.ch/schweiz/lockdown-stoppt-sterbetourismus-zwei-frauen-appellieren-anden-bundesrat-fuer-ihre-letzten-reisen-die-grenze-zu-oeffnen-137836766>
3. The abbot of the Mariastein monastery above Flüh agreed to an interview, in which I was amazed by his tolerance for our thinking. Here is the link to the article: <https://www.bzbasel.ch/basel/baselbiet/waere-gott-dagegen-haette-er-mich-gebremst-sterbebegleiterin-preisig-und-abt-peter-im-interview-136734140>

I thank all our members for their willingness to stand up for this right to a self-determined death. I would also like to express my personal thanks to both priests, who perceive the desire of those around them and do not condemn but respect them.

I'd like to mention a cause which I have long cherished. We have established "Café Goodbye", a gathering which takes place every three months at the museum in Reinach (details on our website) where small groups discuss end of life issues. Within our remit to enhance quality of life, I would also like to establish a "Café Hello". The purpose would be to talk about topics that make us happy and connect us. In old age it is so difficult to rebuild contacts after losing a partner and avoid sinking into loneliness. Café Hello should be somewhere to make new friends, not just for singles! Who would like to participate? Especially in this era of "social distancing" such ideas ought to be implemented, even if we have to keep 2 meters apart for a long time.

So: keep smiling, we'll manage it together! And stay healthy!

Kind regards,

Erika Preisig, General Practitioner and
President of the lifecircle association

