




6minutes News

GP says he changed his mind on VAD after consult with dying patient

RACGP rural chair Dr Michael Clements has done a U-turn on his views after a 78-year-old woman's experience 'turned him around'

 [Carmel Sparke](#)

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Dr Michael Clements.

High-profile GP Dr Michael Clements says he has had a change of mind on voluntary assisted dying after an encounter with a terminally ill cancer patient.

Before Irene Bizon's appointment, the RACGP rural chair says his Anglican faith and medical training meant that he could never become involved in voluntary assisted dying (VAD).

"Prior to meeting Irene, I was pretty comfortable with my position of no, this isn't something I'm going to get involved with," Dr Clements tells *6minutes*.

“My faith is important to me. And the idea of assisted dying doesn’t sit well within my framework.

“As doctors, we train from the first day to save life and ease suffering — that doesn’t mean life at all costs, but it just means that we don’t actively support the process of dying.”

But then Ms Bizon, a 78-year-old with had terminal bowel and lung cancers, came to see Dr Clements on 4 January.

She chose Dr Clements because she’d seen him quoted in the media about VAD being available in Queensland from the start of this year.

Assuming he was an expert, she made an appointment to find out how to access the state’s VAD scheme.

“Irene was a teacher, she was educated, articulate. She came and shared with me her journey, and why it was the right thing for her,” Dr Clements said.

“She had two very nasty cancers that were absolutely going to end her life very quickly, within the next few months.

“So for me, it became a question of ‘do I support the patient in front of me, or don’t I?’”



Irene Bizon. Photo: Newspix.

Dr Clements talked her through what he knew about the process and referred her to another palliative care specialist GP.

Later that month, Ms Bizon’s cancer pain required her to be hospitalised, and she became one of the first Queenslanders to access VAD.

She died on 31 January, with her family around her.

Dr Clement undertook the VAD training, which convinced him of the strength of the legislation.

He said that reassured him that he would never be compelled to help a patient die, but could instead offer them informed advice.

“I really felt I had a responsibility to not necessarily be the doctor that gives an injection to my patient but to be the doctor that supports my patient’s decision,” Dr Clements said.

“So that’s why I did the training and that’s why I’m actively involved now.

“I haven’t prescribed the substance and I don’t see myself ever administering the substance.

“But I’m very happy to support my patients in the process.

“So Irene really turned me around.

“It’s been a good journey.”

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Dr Denis Bartrum
General Practitioner
Karalee, QLD

Michael living up to your surname admirably! I too have an Anglican background and 10 years ago would have considered VAD a step too far. Over the last decade I have pondered the place of religion in the lives and thoughts of man. I have also studied and been ordained as an interfaith minister. In 2022 as a voluntary public hospital chaplain I volunteered to attend preliminary meetings on VAD. I was surprised by the rigour of the QVAD process so completed the QVAD practitioner training and now have become practically involved. Earlier this year I was flown to a town north... [Read more »](#)

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Dr Peter Stephenson
General Practitioner
NARANGBA, QLD

I am a VAD practitioner and have just been the coordinating practitioner for the first of one of my patients. She was 81 and suffering from COPD and was on continual oxygen. Just going to the toilet was severe stress. She had been a nurse and was quite a character and I will miss her. She looked so peaceful in death, and I was so pleased that I had been able to give her what she wanted instead of terminal sedation. I just cannot believe that we have not had VAD for such a long time and that there are... [Read more »](#)

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