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Bleeding led to a CT scan, and, after that, there was no doubt about it. I was told by the surgeon that bowel surgery was very successful and so about eight years ago, I had the first operation. But this turned into eight, each worse than the previous one.

And, I've ended up with a bag and terminal cancer. A couple of personal details will set the scene. I am now 72. I'm married and have twin sons who are about 40. I'm a retired academic from Swinburne University, Melbourne, where my last position was as director of the doctorate in business administration program.

Why so many surgeries you ask? Every six months after the first operation, the cancer kept on reappearing at the point where the bowel was joined.

After the fourth one, a spot appeared on my liver. I had surgery for that. While lying on the gurney after the operation and just after coming to consciousness, the surgeon came up and said, "Sorry there's nothing we can do for you. You have so many spots on your liver; I didn't know where to start."

Bald news indeed, and delivered with such sensitivity!

After being discharged from the hospital I recovered quite quickly but one day I found myself in a panic attack about dying.

My wife knew. My sons knew. But who to talk to? I mentioned this to a friend who suggested I ring Dying With Dignity Victoria for a talk. I was so panicked that I did just that.

The secretary, Rowena White, answered the phone and I poured out my woes and debilitating fear to her.

She listened with astonishing care. She didn't interrupt my tearful, fearful statement. And she sympathised in clear terms with astonishing understanding.

When I ran out of words, she indicated she would get Rodney Syme, the chairman of Dying With Dignity Victoria, to phone me back.

I didn't imagine he would. To my surprise he did, twice.

I was not a member of the organisation, just one more person in despair.

I met Dr Syme, who brought me to the inevitable position that dying is part of life, we just don't know when that's going to be.

He said that preparation was the key. Prepare to be able to make a choice when the going gets tough.

That down-to-earth sensible talk helped me to shift gear into acceptance of the inevitable. I was also having a couple of heart issues so I asked my heart specialist whether any of the heart pills I am taking would enable me to end my life.

Unwilling as he was to say so, he nevertheless told me that one of the pills I was taking would indeed end my life. I would go to sleep and then my heart would stop.

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illnesses. And it's not just cancer, but motor neurone disease, Parkinson's disease, Alzheimer's and so on.

It turned out that I started bleeding from the bowel six months after the liver surgery so the cancer was back in the bowel and I changed hospitals and surgeons. I would've bled to death had I not had surgery. The cancer was back on the join yet again. So there was nothing for it but to have more surgery. This time they found that there were two spots on my liver but nothing else. The first surgeon had got it very wrong.

I had both bowel surgery and liver surgery at the same time. But pathological examination of the removed bowel showed there was a large cancer which no one knew anything about. It was very flat, very thin, and was not detected by the CT scans. That explained why the cancer kept appearing on the join. It was upstream of the join. Fortunately that ended the bowel cancer.

I then had chemotherapy and painful as it was and still is, that seemed to end my problems.

But cancer is a sneaky beast. I had a follow up CT scan after the chemotherapy and there were two spots on my liver.

So in March this year I had yet another resection. It was a difficult operation because of the placement of the spots. Within three weeks of the operation I contracted septicaemia and had invasive thoracic surgery for that. I recovered.

But in June this year I had a follow up CT scan. There were spots on my liver, lungs, and most probably stomach. I was told that there was no more surgery to be had.

That's the way things are. I don't know how much longer I will have to live, months, a year.

But I am at peace. I have all that I need to depart this world and when the going gets rough, that's what I will do. My wife and family are fully informed about this. I have told all my friends. Some are shocked, but by far most say I am courageous.

I don't think about the end, nor do I look forward to it. I have led a most fortunate life. I am surrounded by family and friends. Sometimes we cry together for what is ending. Sometimes we laugh.

After these experiences, I have three pieces of advice. First, get a second opinion. For all my university degrees, I simply believed the first surgeon. I never asked for a second opinion.

The second is for politicians. Don't be so lily livered. Take a stand against suffering and illnesses which are awful and go on and on. Terminal is just that. So let people end their suffering.

And finally, I have advice for the readers of this article.

Join the cause and support change. Join an organisation such as Dying With Dignity.

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But I also came to understand
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of debilitating painful illness. How
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Politicians, praise be not all, but
unhappily most by far, are
unwilling to develop policy for
physician-assisted death in the
face of terminal illness which is
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of the physicians I have dealt with
are unwilling to talk about it. This
is also true of my oncologist. He
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Good Lord, we don't let that
happen to our cats and dogs but
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My loving little dog died in my
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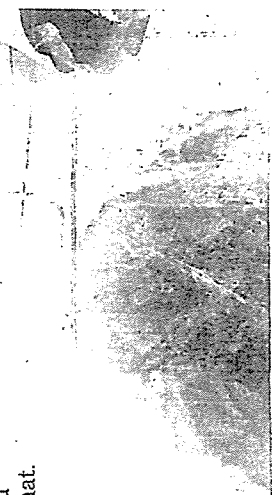
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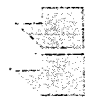
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