



CASE REPORT

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| 1. Complaint reference number | 99/99 |
| 2. Advertiser | Voluntary Euthanasia Society of NSW |
| 3. Product | Community Awareness |
| 4. Type of advertisement | TV |
| 5. Nature of complaint | Health and safety – section 2.6
Other - Miscellaneous |
| 6. Date of determination | Tuesday, 13 April 1999 |
| 7. DETERMINATION | Dismissed |

DESCRIPTION OF THE ADVERTISEMENT

The Advertisement features a woman by the name of June Burns who has bladder cancer. The advertisement shows footage of June talking from her bed (directly to the camera). What she says includes the following: ‘My name is June Burns, I have four children and a loving husband and I’m dying of bladder cancer... Soon I will be in such pain that my life won’t be worth living... I don’t want to have to kill myself but if nobody can help me I’m going to have to... I feel life is very precious and I’ve enjoyed every moment of it and I wish it could go on but I can’t and I’d like to die with dignity... I can cope with what I’ve already been given but I know that I can’t cope with what’s coming.’ The advertisement draws to a conclusion with the words, ‘June Burns has the courage to die. Do you have the courage to let her?’ NSW Voluntary Euthanasia Society’ superimposed on the screen in black and white text.

THE COMPLAINT

Comments some of the complainants made regarding this advertisement included the following:

‘...the add could prove to be unnecessarily distressful for many families who need to care for the seriously ill and who might be wrongly discouraged by the thought that they are not really helping them but acting against their interests. It also opens the door for those who really care little at all about the sick to justify crass neglect or even to act against the lives of the vulnerable out of self interest.’

‘I would urge you to think of our many young people in difficult situations who may be considering suicide. It seems to me that they could be easily influenced by such an ad and think that “this is the way out.”’

‘As a cancer sufferer myself I found this being flashed on the screen in front me more than a little distressing. We all have to face our own mortality, but to blatantly use a woman who was genuinely distressed is not only abhorrent to me (and I am sure many others) but most upsetting for family members who have someone seriously ill in the family.’

THE DETERMINATION

The Advertising Standards Board (‘the Board’) considered whether this advertisement breaches Section 2 of the Advertiser Code of Ethics (‘the Code’).

The Board commented on the contentiousness and level of debate regarding the issue of euthanasia in the community. However, Board members noted that it is not their role to determine the issue of whether or not euthanasia or indeed advertisements for it should be permitted in our society. That is the role of the Parliaments of Australia.

In relation to the content of this particular advertisement, the Board while appreciating the

complainants' personal points of view and personal circumstances, determined that the advertisement did not depict material contrary to prevailing community standards on health and safety and would not offend prevailing community views. The Board determined that the advertisement did not breach the Code and dismissed the complaint.