

# A Doctor's Advice on Choosing How to Die

by A.A. Smyser

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Bud Smyser

**Editor's Note.**—September 1996  
We continue the A.A. "Bud" Smyser "Hawaii's World" Honolulu Star-Bulletin columns. Dr Max Botticelli's presentation is reviewed in this March 12, 1996 issue of the Star-Bulletin, and is reproduced with permission. The Hemlock Hawaii Society can be contacted at (808) 735-7146.

What would you think of a physician who told you—that particularly in our later years, say 65 or over—you should:

- Consider how you want your life extended at all costs your last year likely will be filled with expensive and futile treatments.
- Be aware of the well-intended preachments of the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association implying life is worth extending at all costs. Know that a "successful outcome" such as a reduction in tumor size does not necessarily promise a longer and better life.
- Choose treatments for whether they will make your life better. Learn the odds on a successful outcome. Ask your physician to describe the natural history or progression of your disease. Only then choose between treatment and simply being kept comfortable.
- Be aware that sanctity-of-life preachments may lead to excessive, futile, expensive end-of-life treatments.
- Consider a heart attack as a preferred way to die, as he does. If so, and if your life expectancy is not long, stop worrying about your high cholesterol. It is a main cause of heart attacks. He says high blood pressure on the other hand is a main cause of strokes, which are another matter.
- Be wary of aggressive physicians who for varying reasons,

some crassly financial, will push you toward treatments at all costs. Unfortunately they don't come with labels on their foreheads, he says, but a trusted personal physician who understands your wishes can guide you away from their unnecessary treatments.

- Refrain from calling—or letting your friends call—911 if you want to be allowed to die. If anyone, call your personal physician.
- Be aware that simply having a living will is not enough. Through a power of attorney you should designate people to help aggressively enforce it for you.

Be sure your wishes are thoroughly understood by your agents, family and personal physician, in part to relieve them of any feeling of guilt from promoting your demise.

What would I do with such a physician? I'd love him, heed him, and spread the word about him as I am doing here.

He is Dr Max Botticelli, 64, recently retired as chairman of the John A. Burns School of Medicine at the University of Hawaii. He is one of a handful of socially conscious physicians in Hawaii who are working to make dying a peaceful, even welcome, event. Next to birth it is the most significant religious experience in life, he says.

He urges us to accept death's inevitability and plan for it as we plan for other events in our lives.

It was to a joint meeting of Hemlock Hawaii and the Memorial Society of Hawaii. Some 300 people attended, most of them gray-haired.

He told them he has little faith in working for legislation to improve things. Rather, he would work ever harder to change public opinion. The Hemlock Society and Memorial Society, he said, should be as aggressive in promoting their message as the cancer and heart associations are in promoting theirs.

## Men's March Against Violence

### Thursday, October 10

#### Educating for Non-Violence

This October 10, 1996, Honolulu will celebrate its *2nd Annual Men's March Against Violence*. Once again hundreds of men will march and rally in downtown Honolulu led by civic and educational leaders. We are expecting more than 500 men marching and 300 women lining the route and joining them at the rally. This year's theme is Educating for Non-Violence. It is time for men to stand up and take a stand against violence in our homes, schools and commu-

nities. It is time for each of us to break the silence and begin educating our children, our brothers and sisters, our fellow workers, and our leaders about non-violence. Join us!

While this is a march for men who wish to make a significant and courageous statement against violence, women are encouraged to support the marchers on the route, and attend the rally. For women who feel strongly about participating on a more profound level, please contact the YWCA Honolulu at 538-7061 and ask for information about the entire week which is filled with various events to bring Domestic Violence to an end. For regular updates contact Joe Bloom at 536-1794, or by fax: 599-8761. Leave your name, organization and fax number.