

The EAPC, a NGO at the COUNCIL of EUROPE

Report of Maurice CHAUSSON September 1999

The EAPC has been enjoying NGO status with the Council of Europe in Strasbourg since January 1998. This status was achieved thanks to the work of Maurice Chausson (Director of the Association Pierre Clement based in Strasbourg and Member of the Board of the Société Française de Soins Palliatifs) who liaises with the Council of Europe together with Heidi Blumhuber.

The Council of Europe grants consultative status to the associations that have been recognised by it as non-governmental organisations. Through various consultation arrangements, it brings them into its activities on major society issues: human rights, social and economic issues, education, culture and heritage, sport, youth, environment and health.

The NGOs meet three times a year to explore these issues. The EAPC participates in the Health Group meetings. Maurice Chausson was present at the three meetings that were organised in 1998. The Group was not very efficient because it was being restructured at the time and hardly any work was done. In the new structure, M. Chausson has been appointed joint Executive Officer of the Group and, as such, he succeeded in having palliative care chosen as a theme of work in 1999 together with health education for young people.

In 1999 he thus managed to make over 20 NGOs aware of the work of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly on an important document against euthanasia: this is a report written by Mrs Edeltraud GATTERER (Austria) on "Human rights protection and dignity of the incurably ill and dying people". The EAPC took action to support this report that was presented by Mrs Gatterer on 25th June 1999 and adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly, despite strong opposition by the supporters of euthanasia.

The report was published recently in its final version by the Council of Europe. M. Chausson sent a copy to the EAPC. This is an essential document. However, it is not legally binding because the Council of Europe does not set up laws. It helps consolidate human rights throughout Europe and suggests common solutions to the social, cultural or legal challenges faced by its 41 Member States.

In the future, the NGO HEALTH Group will focus on the two following issues:

1. Palliative care and GPs. Palliative care and independent nurses: Which means of dissemination? Which training programmes? Is it possible to find examples of achievements (even limited) in Europe that can be reproduced?
2. Palliative care and the society: What is the involvement of citizens? The importance of voluntary work and its future. The Group's work is entering into a very active phase and M. Chausson will thus have to establish ongoing contacts with the EAPC and possibly ask for the input from its members.