

Dr. Joseph Santamaria oam

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Submission to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee
Inquiry into the Therapeutic Goods Amendment on the Drug RU486.

I write in support of the submission of Dr. David van Gend which has appeared on the website of the Senate Committee, dated December 14, 2005. He has expressed clearly and comprehensively my own views on the approval of the drug RU486 for the specific purpose of inducing a "medical abortion."

The proposal of using this drug to terminate a pregnancy, especially in the outback areas of Australia, among a population of people with inadequate knowledge of the concerns that have arisen in the United States about its serious complications, even with the availability of the necessary backup services that are necessary, would amount to an irresponsible decision. The issues at stake are beyond the competence of a body of experts whose expertise is assessing the pharmacology of the drug and its effectiveness in terminating a pregnancy, a non-pathological state. They do not have the brief to consider evidence that is of an ethical nature nor the psychosocial studies on post-abortion syndromes.

I remain surprised and dismayed by the endorsement given to the proposed amendment by some medical organisations, such as the Australian Medical Association and the College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists. Their position is not supported by recent comments in the New England Journal of Medicine.

This is a matter that affects the whole of the Australian community and it should be subject to the scrutiny of the Australian Parliament. It should not be determined by a non - elected lower order of governance with a narrow focus of competence and without the responsibility for the common good of our society. The submission of Dr. Gawler clearly sets out the great dangers to the outback community of this proposed legislative change.

The amendment should be rejected and the current legislation should be endorsed and adopted as an important public health approach to a complex situation. Doctor van Gend has outlined a commendable set of recommendations that I strongly support.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. J.N. Santamaria

Dr. J. Santamaria is a consultant physician, an emeritus chairman of St. Vincent's Bioethics Centre and the retired former Director of a Department of Community Medicine in Melbourne.