



Maxine Peters, 90, suffered from Alzheimer's and Parkinson's disease. With help from hospice workers in Gladesville, WV, she was able to take her last breath at home, surrounded by family and friends.

## PROJECT ON DEATH IN AMERICA: LEADERSHIP, DISCOURSE, PARTNERSHIP

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THE Project on Death in America was one of the first philanthropic initiatives of George Soros that focused on the United States. As the project concludes its first six years, now is a good moment to take stock of its impact, as a pioneer among OSI's U.S. Programs, on the strategies and approaches the foundation uses to address barriers to participation in open society.

### Leadership

From the beginning, PDIA recognized the critical role of leadership in strengthening the field of end-of-life care, and the Faculty Scholars Program has been at the center of the project's ambitious mission to change the culture of dying in the United States. Beginning with physicians and nurses but more recently broadening its focus to include social workers, PDIA's professional education projects aim to build a cadre of leaders, provide opportunities for networking and technical support, and foster innovation and risk-taking.

OSI has drawn on these lessons in creating and working with the Soros Justice Fellows, the New York and Baltimore Community Fellows, and the program on Medicine as a Profession Advocacy Fellows.

## Broadening Discussion

In just six years, PDIA and its scholars and grantees have increased the public discourse about death, which, while a universal event, remains a highly sensitive and personal one. Through the writings of its Faculty Scholars and of Dr. Kathleen Foley and PDIA's highly engaged staff and board, the plays, dances, and films of its Arts and Humanities grantees, and the voices of those supported through its varied grants program, PDIA has us all talking more about death — the way families, communities, and government deal with it and the choices we all make. Nothing demonstrated this changed landscape more dramatically than the huge public response to Bill Moyers' 2000 PBS series "On Our Own Terms," which featured many PDIA scholars and grantees.

Broadening public discussion and debate on sensitive and difficult topics has been a hallmark of virtually all OSI U.S. Programs that have followed PDIA, characterizing the Lindesmith Center's work on drug policy, the Center on Crime, Communities and Culture's focus on incarceration, and the Gideon Project's efforts around the death penalty and indigent defense.

## Partnerships

Although OSI has often stepped out ahead of others, and sometimes functions alone, all of the significant open society problems we deal with require broad partnerships to make a sustained difference. Again, PDIA pointed the way in joining with the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, the Nathan Cummings Foundation, the Rockefeller Family Office, and the Commonwealth Fund to form Grantmakers Concerned with Care at the End of Life to collaborate and share information and strategies. Virtually

all subsequent U.S. Programs have followed this model. More recently, OSI has sought to develop partnerships or join at the genesis of an initiative. The Funders' Collaborative for Gun Violence Prevention is a partnership with the Irene Diamond Fund and others, and a recent effort to improve New York City public schools is being pursued with the Carnegie Corporation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

The Project on Death in America itself has benefited from membership in the OSI family of initiatives. In the last few years, PDIA has increasingly dealt with death and dying issues faced by more vulnerable and traditionally marginalized groups: the maldistribution of access to palliative care for African Americans; the special needs of those who face death while incarcerated; and urban young people who must deal with more death than anyone should have to experience at such an early age. In response to these last two issues, PDIA has engaged in especially fruitful collaborations with three other OSI programs, the

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Lindesmith Center (now an independent organization), the Center on Crime, Communities and Culture, and Youth Initiatives.

Finally, PDIA is increasingly focusing on public policy goals and supporting an array of advocacy strategies to achieve them. Through its support for Americans for Better Care of the Dying, for example, PDIA is advancing efforts to reform Medicare reimbursement policies for continuous, long-term palliative care. Through its support of the Judge David L. Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law, PDIA is supporting litigation strategies to build a constitutional right to appropriate pain relief and palliative care.

The dynamism of the PDIA board and staff in identifying and supporting leaders, fostering discussion, and forging partnerships holds great promise that a better experience for dying people, their families, and loved ones will become a reality for more and more of us in the years to come.