



angels grace

— HOSPICE —

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Doctors Lead the Way in Expressing End-of-Life Care Preferences

For doctors, it can be difficult to begin a conversation with a patient about end-of-life care options. Should the patient undergo an aggressive medical treatment that will only extend life for a brief period, or is it time to focus on comfort care? When there is no longer a chance that medical treatment can cure the patient's illness, some doctors feel like they are letting the patient down. Recommending comfort-only care can feel like admitting defeat.

But for their own end-of-life care plans, doctors see the situation clearly. Because doctors have so many patients that suffer in their final days, the large majority of medical professionals do not want aggressive or life-prolonging care at the end of life for themselves. A recent study by Stanford University found that nearly 90% of doctors would choose do-not-resuscitate orders for themselves, meaning they would not want life-prolonging measures (like CPR or ventilators) used if they were terminally ill.

"Poor knowledge and misguided expectations" can lead to poor end-of-life choices, says Ken Murray, MD, in his popular online essay titled "How Doctors Die." For patients who are severely or terminally ill, or for those who are elderly, the odds of suffering during and after CPR are "overwhelming." But unrealistic expectations of what doctors are able to do lead many people to believe that medical teams should "do everything" to try and keep loved ones alive, even if such action puts the person in pain.

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Doctors understand that dying peacefully often means knowing when to make the decision to stop or avoid certain medical treatments, and discussing the decision with their loved ones. Because many people haven't discussed or written down their end-of-life wishes beforehand, family members can be left in a panic when their loved one is facing emergency life-saving measures such as CPR or placing a feeding tube. Implementing these measures often means that a patient will die in the hospital, despite most people expressing a preference to die peacefully at home surrounded by loved ones.

In a medical system that encourages overtreatment, "doing more" can become the default option: more chemotherapy, more drugs, more surgery. "[Doctors] see the consequences of [overtreatment] constantly," Murray states. As an alternative, "almost anyone can find a way to die in peace at home, and pain can be managed better than ever."

"Hospice care, which focuses on providing terminally ill patients with comfort and dignity rather than on futile cures, provides most people with much better final days," he says. "Amazingly, studies have found that people placed in hospice care often live longer than people with the same disease who are seeking active cures."

Hospice can help patients and loved ones focus on quality of life and find "death with dignity," Murray concludes.



Hospice Information for Patients and Families

Documentary Follows Final Weeks of Cancer Patient's Life

"I Am Dying," a special feature that premiered recently on the National Geographic Channel, chronicles the end-of-life experience of Renee Heidtman, a 32-year-old woman dying of cancer.

Produced in part by Joaquin Phoenix and Casey Affleck, the film offers a raw, personal look at the realities of end-of-life care and the stages that many people pass through as they enter their final days, including the decision to stop curative treatment and receive in-home hospice care.

"We're all going to live, and we're all going to die, and there's no stopping it," Renee says in one of her video diaries featured in the film. "I'm not afraid to die. To die is something that is sacred. To die is something that you don't keep to yourself."

Visitors come and go over the course of the footage, but Renee's end-of-life care coordinator makes multiple appearances, as do her hospice director and a few hospice volunteers. These hospice caretakers provide a support system for Renee's sister, Rita, who moves from the Midwest to California to be Renee's full-time caregiver.

Despite the difficulties in relocating, Rita supports her sister's right to choose where and how she will die. And even though it's hard to watch Renee decline, Rita affirms that "friends and family are going to take care of you better than any other person."

Hospice provides the support that family members need to get through these difficult days. As portrayed in the film, the goal of hospice is to provide death with dignity, no matter the patient's location, circumstances, or caregiver situation. Hospice team members strive to provide patients and caregivers with serenity and acceptance as they embrace the end of life.

For more information about the film, visit channel.nationalgeographic.com/galleries/i-am-dying.

Fund Grants End-of-Life Wishes for Hospice Patients

For patients enrolled in hospice, there are often certain wishes they would like to see fulfilled before they reach the end of life. These wishes may include meals at a favorite restaurant, arranging for out-of-town friends or family members to visit, or taking special trips with loved ones. Because of the expense involved, these goals may be unattainable for many patients and families.

The Lighthouse of Hope Fund, managed by the National Hospice Foundation, fulfills these wishes in the form of grants allocated to hospices that are members of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. These hospice care teams can submit requests on behalf of patients who have a life expectancy of one year or less, and who have no other means to fund their wish.

Funded by donations, the fund "serves

a unique and vital role, enhancing the quality of life of hospice patients and their families so that their remaining time together can be meaningful and memorable," reads the website for the Lighthouse of Hope Fund.

Fulfilling these wishes "can help people with life-limiting illness improve the quality of their lives in ways medicine alone cannot," the site states. "Our Lighthouse of Hope Fund offers children and adults with a life-limiting illness such as cancer, heart failure, liver disease, end-stage renal disease, and ALS the chance to take a break by allowing them to have their wishes and dreams come true."

If you or a loved one is interested in submitting a request for funding, speak with your local hospice provider. For more information, or to donate directly to the Lighthouse of Hope Fund to make these dreams possible for hospice patients, visit www.nationalhospicefoundation.org/lighthouseofhopefund.



Some people mistakenly think hospice care is just about dying...nothing could be further from the truth. Hospice helps patients and families focus on living. Angels Grace Hospice, LLC, brings comfort, dignity and peace to help people with a life-limiting illness live every moment of life to the fullest. We also provide support for family and friends.

We are licensed in the state of Illinois, Medicare Certified, Joint Commission Accredited and are locally owned and operated by experienced professionals dedicated to providing excellent end-of-life care for Will, Cook, DuPage, Kendall, Grundy, and Kane counties. Please contact us for more information.

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To comfort always... this is our work

