

Living Life on Your Terms
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After experiencing some recent deaths in my family, I feel that I owe it to the community to share information regarding how important it is to speak with your loved ones regarding their expectations at end of life. I am sure we have all witnessed how important it is for these talks to occur before the crisis. It makes it easier on a family if they know they are abiding by their loved ones wishes and not making assumptions that this is what their loved one would want. It also helps to keep the family closer when the family is not torn apart by two separate sides feeling they know what their loved one would want, but no side really knowing for sure. Hopefully, after reading this article, everyone will be able to take advantage of conversation triggers, when they occur and have meaningful discussions regarding end of life issues. Please do not let this opportunity pass you by.

Most loved ones gather for a meal following a funeral or visitation. This is a time when most people, even if they are not verbalizing it, are giving thought to end of life issues. Some are thinking, "I would never want to go through that chemo he went through for anything. I would rather be able to do what I want with my grandkids and enjoy life for a shorter time." Another person may be thinking, "Even the possibility of one more day would be important to me; I would do everything I could to hold on to life. He was a fighter and I plan to do the same thing." Keep in mind that you may not agree with or will be shocked with what your loved one wants, which is another reason why it is important to have these talks. No two people are exactly alike when it comes to decisions regarding their end of life care and there are no wrong answers. You must enter into any conversation with an open mind and not with the opinion that you are going to impose your beliefs and wishes on your loved one. This is a time for you to learn what your loved one thinks about the choices that are available and why.

If your family communicates easily you may want to sit down with your spouse and discuss your end of life decisions, then go to your parents and let them know your wishes. This would be a good way to get the conversation flowing with your parents about their wishes. Don't be surprised if your conversation with your parents does not go as planned. Some people fear that talking about death may make it to happen. You may get responses like, "You're healthy and young, nothing bad is going to happen to you!" You may continue with something like, "Deb and I have agreed on what we each want, and have written it down. My doctor has a copy. I plan to be conscious and able to communicate as long as possible, while Deb is worried about pain and would prefer to be sedated, even if it means being out of touch. Which do you think you would want?" You may get the response, "I plan on dying in my sleep." You may respond with, "This may happen, but you cannot be sure it will." This may be as far as you can get at this point. But, you can continue to use other conversation triggers that occur to keep chipping away at the wall that your family member has built.

It is important to share your wishes regarding end of life care with your loved ones and your

physician. Most people feel better knowing this planning is done and that their family and physician know their wishes. It is a hard thing to think about, but it is oftentimes a relief to face it.

When the time comes that end of life care is needed, a great resource is Hospice. If you have a parent or grandparent that is declining and you feel they are in their last stages of life, whether it be from cancer, alzheimers or a condition such as heart disease, it is important to bring up hospice to them. Hospice can help your loved one to live their final stages of life on their terms, while providing them with symptom control.

If you have questions regarding whether Hospice is appropriate for your loved one, please give Linda Fisher, RN, Hoosier Uplands Hospice Patient Care Coordinator a call at (800) 827-2219.

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