

Gayle Mattson: Document your wishes for end-of-life care

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Just a few decades ago, the culture around giving birth was very different and has evolved quickly into a more patient-centric experience that benefits the mother, child and family. This was achieved by a social movement that began in the 1970s to move away from a clinical approach to a more holistic approach.

We need that same social movement to happen when it comes to end-of-life. There is a significant gap in this country with regard to advanced illness and end-of-life care that needs to be addressed. Some even consider it a public health crisis.

For chronic and late-stage illness, the majority of Americans say they prefer to stay in their homes, rather than in other settings, with the support of their families who are their most trusted caregivers. This can be achieved through services including hospice care, palliative care and advance care planning.

However, a 2013 survey released by The Conversation Project revealed that “while more than 9 in 10 Americans think it’s important to talk about their own and their loved ones’ wishes for end-of-life care, less than 3 in 10 have actually held these sorts of discussions.”

In response to this serious gap, Haven has committed to reaching individuals earlier in their advanced illness journey so that everyone in our communities can have quality of life at the end of life by offering advance care planning at no cost to individuals or their health care providers.

Haven's program is staffed with certified Respecting Choices facilitators, an internationally recognized, evidence-based model of advance care planning. Haven not only wants to create awareness but ignite action in bringing comfort, care and compassion to all members of the communities we serve.

Anyone over the age of 18 can complete an advance care plan, and it is so important for people who have been diagnosed with a life-limiting illness. When first receiving this type of diagnosis, it is vital for individuals to discuss and document their health-care goals, values and wishes in a format they can keep, share and update.

An advance care plan is a dynamic process that is meant to change as the individual's health-care goals change in the progression of their illness. It is essential in ensuring that they receive the medical treatment consistent with their goals and preferences, especially if they face an unforeseen medical crisis and lose the ability to communicate.

The process involves sharing personal values and beliefs with their health-care provider, exploring what an individual may or may not want in certain medical situations, and choosing someone to communicate the individual's wishes if they are unable to. This document can be shared with family members and health-care providers and then reassessed and updated periodically. An advance care plan is a gift to those you love by providing clear guidance on what you want and do not want.

During National Hospice and Palliative Care Month, I would like to encourage the members of the Gainesville community to have those important conversations with family and their health-care providers as well as document their wishes in an advance care plan.

Clearly documenting your choices for current and future medical care and treatment with your health-care provider will improve your understanding of

your medical condition and make you aware of the available options for care while improving communication between you, your loved ones and your health-care provider.

Gayle Mattson is the president of Haven, which provides hospice services, advance care planning, palliative care consultations and transitions services with a patient-centric focus. To find out more about Haven programs and services, visit www.beyourhaven.org or call 352-378-2121.

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