Helping your family survive when you die

Why is that we spend lots of time, energy and money organising the arrival of a baby but we shy away from that other once in a lifetime event called dying?

Dr Louise Welch, Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service Clinical Director, Specialist Palliative Care Service said preparation for dying is important and should be planned for as much as possible.

“All of us will be touched by loss in our lifetime and inevitably die ourselves. That journey from the diagnosis of a palliative condition to the actual end of life care can be quite short - sometimes maybe only a few days,” Dr Welch said.

“Death happens and we all need to plan for it. This is why it is important everyone is aware of the need for Advance Care Planning.”

Advance Care Planning is a process that helps plan medical care in advance so if a person becomes too unwell to make decisions, their wishes can still be respected by the healthcare team, the family and carers.

Dr Welch said “Advance Care Planning is suitable for everyone, not just when a person is diagnosed with a terminal condition.

“I have had the privilege of providing medical care and support to hundreds of palliative patients, their carers and family for the past twenty years.

“From my experience, the most difficult conversations are often with those patients and families who have not considered dying as a part of life’s journey.

“As a result, in a crisis, the medical and health care discussions are fraught with high emotion and distress.

“Our team of palliative care staff have these discussions almost on a daily basis as we support patients, carers and families on their journey”.

The Sunshine Coast Hospital and Health Service Specialist Palliative Care team provides quality of life support, consultation and advice for people (and their families/carers) with a life limiting illness.

The service aims to:
• manage pain/symptoms
• reduce emotional stress
• discuss spiritual/cultural needs
• discuss end of life wishes and setting
• discuss Advance Care Planning (Will, Enduring Power of Attorney, Advanced Health Directive).

It includes an inpatient service at Caloundra Hospital (Dove Palliative Care Unit), an outreach community service and an in-reach service to public and private hospitals.

The Specialist Palliative Care Service works also closely with non government organisations in the community in the provision of palliative care in the home. The service is also able to provide home visits to those patients unable to leave the house or attend outpatient clinics.

Palliative Care services are available to people living on the Sunshine Coast from Glasshouse Mountains to Gympie and can be accessed by phoning 07 5470 5333 or emailing SC-Palliative-Care@health.qld.gov.au

Next week is National Palliative Care Week (25 – 31 May) and this year’s theme is working together to ensure that palliative care is everyone’s business and provides an opportune time for everyone to ask the following questions about Advance Care Planning:

• Is my Will up to date?
• Have I appointed an Enduring Power of Attorney?
• Have I considered an Advance Health Directive
• Have I spoken to my family and a GP about my wishes for End of Life Care?
• Do I know what my spouse, partner, children, parents want in relation to their care?

For more information go to www.carewsearch.com.au or www.palliativecare.org.au

ENDS

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