The Last Goodbye: Lessons from End-of-Life Care

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Introduction

End-of-life care provides comfort to patients who are approaching death. It covers care for dignity and quality of life when facing a terminal illness. Examples include pain management, support, guidance, and advanced care planning. There are many benefits to receiving end-of-life care. Patients who receive excellent care in their final moments can live out their final days in accordance with their values. By partnering with patients to provide support, caregivers can ensure everyone's needs are met during this difficult time.

Communication was recognized as a skill that needs improvement. Doctors and caregivers can improve the experience for families by asking about care preferences. For example, providers can focus on advanced care planning and shared decision-making (Nieves, 2020).

By continuing to include the patient and their family in conversations about end-of-life care, medical professionals can better assist with the grieving process and allow for family input on care.

Neves et al. (2020) state that communication will be the focus next. Medical care teams should ensure they are communicating effectively with patients and their families. When everyone is on the same page, care decisions can be made according to the patients' wishes. Improving communication strengthens the relationships between patients and caregivers. This will ultimately allow patients to have the best possible experience as they say their last goodbye.

Communication

Communication is key when discussing end-of-life care. Not only can it improve the patient experience, but it also allows for family involvement. When caregivers take the time to speak with their patients about their fears or concerns, it helps patients feel more comfortable with their care.

End-of-life can be a scary time for many people as they are faced with making decisions about their care and treatment.

Allowing the patient to speak without interruption is one way to allow them to feel heard. When patients know that their opinions and wishes matter, they will feel more comfortable with the care they choose to receive. Involving family is another way to allow patients to feel heard. Families can help voice patients' wishes while allowing caregivers to meet patients where they are. It allows the patient to feel comfortable sharing their opinions while knowing their family is there to support them.

Explaining all treatment options and care choices allows the patient to make an informed decision. Patients should know the benefits and burdens of every treatment option. Caregivers can allow the patient to decide what they want while guiding the conversation. As we have learned the importance of communication, let's discuss how culture can shape it.

Cultural Sensitivity in Care

Being culturally sensitive to your patients is important in end-of-life care. Patients feel comfortable discussing their fears, and medical professionals take the time to understand them. For example, if a patient was dying from cancer, it would be important to understand their background. Budiastuti et al. (2019) discussed the case study of a patient who found comfort in prayer with her. Allowing the patient to practice her religious beliefs made her feel more comfortable about what lay ahead.

Caregivers can use certain practices to better align care to their patients' needs. By learning about different practices around the world, caregivers can create better care plans. Families are more comfortable sharing their opinions, which allows the care team to meet the patient where they are. Patients who are dying can face fear when they are not able to make decisions about their lives. Allowing caregivers to truly get to know a

patient will improve the care experience. As cultural sensitivity shapes the care experience, let's discuss how ethics also play a role.

Ethical Considerations

Ethics plays a major role in end-of-life care. Patients should feel they can make their own decisions when speaking with their caregivers. Autonomy is an individual's ability to make decisions about their life. Caregivers providing end-of-life care should ensure the patient understands their options. Caregivers should do their part not only by communicating information but also by allowing the patient to make an informed decision.

Some patients want to continue to fight when they are dying, while others do not. This is why it is so important for caregivers to have conversations with their patients about their end-of-life care (Alanazi et al., 2024). Providers can allow their patient to live out their last moments according to their values. Many patients who are terminally ill fear losing their autonomy. Autonomy allows these patients to feel they still have a choice in their health care.

Ethics not only allows patients to decide what they want but also enables caregivers to challenge injustices. Health care teams can use ethical practices to help provide patient-centered care.

The Importance of Palliative Care

Palliative care focuses on providing patients with relief from their symptoms, pain, and stress. No matter the illness, everyone can benefit from receiving palliative care. The goal is to allow patients to feel comforted during their hardest times. Palliative care can occur alongside care intended to cure patients of their illnesses.

Not only does palliative care allow the patient to feel comfortable, but it can also improve family dynamics. When patients have someone to talk to about their emotions, they can clearly communicate what they want.

Families have an easier time making decisions when care teams have discussed end-of-life care. Studies have shown that families experience less stress when their loved one is provided with palliative care

Lessons From Personal Stories

Studies have shown that patients enjoy hearing about their care providers' personal lives. When caregivers open up about themselves, it helps a patient know they are more than just another case. “I listen to their fears and wishes” clearly shows that the caregiver took the time to understand their patient.

Patients have stated that they enjoy when caregivers ask about their personal lives. When you take the time to listen to your patient, you allow them to feel heard. Not only does sharing personal information help the patient feel heard, but it can also help the patient open up.

Caregivers should take these lessons to heart when entering the work field. “It can be difficult providing end-of-life care because you grow attached.” This is common among many people in the medical field.

Challenges in End-of-Life Care

There are many barriers that prevent patients from receiving end-of-life care. Our medical systems focus on providing curative care rather than end-of-life care. If a hospital does not provide services such as pain management, patients may feel as though there is no one to turn to during their worst times. Not only is there a lack of care, but there are also no resources being allocated to programs that can provide patients with relief.

Due to limited funds for end-of-life care, resources are scarce. Just like any other medical program, there needs to be funds going into it. If there is insufficient funding for end-of-life care, patients will not receive the help they need. Some patients hope to continue to receive treatments that may no longer be beneficial.

Lastly, some patients are not told about their options, while others are forced to receive treatments they don't want. As medical professionals, it is our job to listen to our patients and share our knowledge. There should be no difference in what the doctor thinks is best and what the patient thinks is best.

If we can improve these challenges, we can provide better end-of-life care. The future of end-of-life care will focus on how we can improve the care that patients.

Future Direction in End-of-Life Care

Technology is becoming more prominent in-patient care. Telehealth allows patients to speak with their doctor from the comfort of their home. Families can spend more time with their loved ones during their last moments while still receiving emotional support from a counselor. Technology can help improve communication between doctors and patients.

Many patients like to prepare for the unknown in advance. Patients have the right to know what they want during their last moments while they are still able to make clear decisions. Medical professionals are starting to learn to ask their patients about their end-of-life care wishes. Not only are doctors starting to include patients in the conversation, but they are also including their families.

Policy recommendations can help improve patients' experience of end-of-life care. By making lawmakers aware of the importance of palliative care, lawmakers can push for more funding. If we can improve end-of-life care by focusing on palliative care in the medical field, we can better care for patients. These improvements can help patients feel more comfortable in their final moments

Conclusion and Reflection

One of the biggest lessons we learned is to ensure your patient feels heard. By simply listening to your patient, you can build the trust they need to feel comfortable with their care. We also learned that culture plays an important role in end-of-life care. Patients want someone who can understand where they are coming from.

Lastly, we learned that it is important to allow your patient to make their own decision. As health care providers, we can guide our patients, but we should never force them to make a decision. They are at the end of their lives and deserve to experience it how they want to.

We learned that simply listening to your patient can make a difference. When I took the time to listen to my patient without interrupting, we felt as though we had built a connection. Everyone has different beliefs that can shape how they experience death.

By learning about your patient, you allow them to feel comfortable with their decisions. We can improve end-of-life care by simply taking the time to understand our patients.

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