



HOSPICE & HEALTHCARE
COMMUNICATIONS

Talking About Talking About Death: How Contemporary Media Can Help You, Your Patients and Families

In 1969, Dr. Elisabeth Kubler-Ross wrote *On Death and Dying*, the groundbreaking book that discussed the importance of listening to patients and as well, the Five Stages of the Dying.

Whether you agree with the Five Stages, patients and their families quite often know of the five stages in some way, so it's important for us to review what they are.

What are the Five Stages?

- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

Basically, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross felt that individuals *could* go through some of the stages, none of the stages or all of the stages. They may experience them at different times and most went through them in a non-linear fashion. It is important to remember that each person's grief is as individual as their DNA.

What about hope, an important part of the Dr. Kubler-Ross' Five Stages Chart? She felt:

- Hope is a part of every patient's life, which is why it is not a "stage"
- When the patient lost all hope, he or she would die imminently

To date, the Five Stages have been mentioned in hundreds of songs, Broadway shows and television shows. This explains why, if we are going to “meet patients where they are” we need to understand where they are getting their information on end of life and grief.

Research that discuss end of life care conversations:

2015 Stanford study from two large hospitals found that 1,040 physicians found it difficult to have end of life conversations with patients who belonged to an ethnicity other than they own.

Findings from Dr. Angelo Volandes in his book:

The Conversation: A Revolutionary Plan For End of Life

- 80% of Americans want to be at home with family or friends in relative comfort vs a hospital at time of death
- Only 24% of Americans over 65 will die at home
- 63% will die in a nursing home
- He feels the discrepancy is due to doctors not having conversations about how to live until death.

Dr. Angelo Volandes on the topic of Hope:

“...even today, some oncologists are hesitant to discuss medical care with patients in the advanced stages of cancer out of fear they will dash any hope the patient clings to, despite extensive medical research that indicates many patients do, in fact, want to talk about these topics with their physicians.”

Contemporary movements that helps patients, families and clinicians:

- Let’s Have Dinner and Talk About Death (www.deathoverdinner.org)
- Death Café (www.deathcafe.com)
- The Conversation Project (www.conversationproject.org)

Remember: Our role is to bridge the gap, to understand where patients are formulating their own thoughts on life and end of life. This will help us to communicate with them—while also building bridges toward informed, fact-based, patient-driven decision making.