

# MSII Life Cycle Curriculum: Caring for the Dying

UCHSC Center for Bioethics and the Life Quality Institute  
Daniel Johnson MD

## **Session 1 – Examining the “Good Death”: An Introduction to Palliative Care**

Format: Two-hour classroom session

Overview: This session will introduce students to the field of hospice and palliative medicine. During the first half of session, students will explore their own values and perspectives around the “good death” through an interactive exercise entitled *Go Wish*. In the second half of the session, facilitators will describe core features of palliative care.

Objectives: Following this session, students will:

1. Describe individual- and population-based variability amongst end-of-life care preferences for information and treatment
2. Define “palliative care”
3. State similarities and differences between “palliative care” and “hospice”

Format and Methods:

Large Group Interactive Exercise: *Go Wish*

Large Group Didactic Session

Outcome measures:

1. Document top 5 *Go Wish* preferences
2. Complete five-question knowledge examination
3. Complete session evaluation

Required Reading:

Morrison RS, Meier DE. Palliative Care. *N Engl J Med* 2004;350:2582-90.

Abrams F. An Old Man’s Best Friend, from “Doctors on the Edge”, 2006.

Optional Reading:

Steinhauser KE et al. In Search of a Good Death: Observations of Patients, Families, and Providers. *Ann Intern Med* 2000;132(10):825-32.

Parrish JA. An Unquiet Death. *JAMA* 2006;296(21):2531-2532.

Session Handouts:

Johnson DC. Caring for Patients with Advanced Illness (PP slides), 2006

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### **Session 2 – Final Breaths: The Physiology and Psychology of Dying**

Format: Two-hour classroom session

Overview: This session will use patient-cases to highlight common features of the “normal” dying process. Cases will emphasize:

- Functional trajectories at the end of life
- Normal physiologic changes with dying
- Common end-of-life physical and psychological symptoms
- Emotional, social and spiritual distress at the end of life
- Normal and complicated grief

Objectives: Following this session, students will:

1. Describe three common functional trajectories for patients with advanced illness
2. Describe common physiologic changes in the last weeks and days of life
3. List five common physical and psychological symptoms at the end of life and describe three barriers to effective symptom management
4. State Eric Cassell’s definition of “suffering”, and cite three examples of psychosocial and/or spiritual distress in dying patients
5. Define and describe features of normal and complicated grief

Format and Methods:

Case-based Didactic/Interactive Session

Outcome measures:

1. Complete 10-question knowledge examination
2. Complete session evaluation

Required Reading:

Plonk et al. Terminal Care: The Last Weeks of Life. *J Pall Med* 2005;8(5):1042-54.

Optional Reading:

Lunney J et al. Patterns of Functional Decline at the End of Life. *JAMA* 2003;289:2387-92.

Session Handouts:

Johnson DC. Final Breaths: The Physiology and Psychology of Dying (PP slides), 2006

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### **Session 3 – When Your Patient is Dying: Empathy and Emotion**

Format: One-hour classroom session

Overview: This session will examine the role of empathy and emotion in end-of-life care and communication. The session will incorporate film and music clips to highlight techniques that promote emotional “connectedness” and “mindfulness” in difficult end-of-life conversations. The presentation will offer strategies and suggestions to better “manage” powerful emotions when caring for dying patients.

Objectives: To complete this session, students will:

1. Reflect upon and write about an instance where strong emotion played a prominent role in a patient-provider interaction
2. Explain “mindful practice” and provide an example of how a care provider can simultaneously attend to patient/family and personal emotion

Format and Methods:

Pre-session Writing Assignment

Large Group Multimedia Presentation

Outcome measures:

1. Complete one-page writing assignment (Pass/Fail)
2. Complete session evaluation

Optional Reading:

Meier D et al. The Inner Life of Physicians and Care of the Seriously Ill. *JAMA* 2001;286(23):3007-3014.

Session Handouts:

None