

Editorial

The End of Life From a Nurse's Perspective

Nancy Davis, MA, MN

Medical Administration, Ochsner Clinic Foundation, New Orleans, LA

As a young nursing student, I was drawn to the work and insights of Elisabeth Kübler-Ross. It made sense to me that as caregivers, nurses must understand and honor the last passages of life. As I have had many personal and professional experiences with death over the years, my appreciation of nurses' contributions to helping patients and families find meaning and dignity at the end of life has deepened.

Caring for patients is a team effort. Each team member and all of the disciplines play crucial roles, have different professional cultures, and want the best for patients. Nurses frequently see themselves as having the privilege of being able to care for the patient's mind, spirit, and body within the patient's social network. This holistic approach to caring often enables nurses to intuitively sense the patient's feelings and thoughts as death nears. Frequently, in my experience, nurses understand the value in being

available to listen or simply being present with the patient and family near the end after all of the diagnostics and all of the interventions.

Whenever I talk with nurses about their most meaningful patient care experiences, the stories almost always center on making a difference for patients at the end of their lives. Similarly, when I talk with families who have lost loved ones, they almost always relate stories about the nurses who were caring for the patient at the end of life. What matters most to them seems to be the nurse's ability to connect emotionally with the patient and family, the ways they honor the wishes of the patient, and their willingness to be present at this profound milestone.

Caring for people at the end of life is an honor and a privilege given to very few. Nurses are grateful for these opportunities to care and connect during the passing of life.

*Address correspondence to
Nancy Davis, MA, MN
Medical Administration
Ochsner Clinic Foundation
1514 Jefferson Highway
New Orleans, LA 70121
Tel: (504) 842-3082
Fax: (504) 842-3068
Email: ndavis@ochsner.org*