

About This Series:

At some time during our lifetime many of us will be called upon to help a friend or family member through their dying process.

The extent of our involvement can range from companionship to being the primary caregiver. While the latter is the most challenging of commitments, even being a compassionate friend under such circumstances can be a challenge for some.

The challenge arises from our lack of knowledge or experience in coping with situations where someone is dying. Such situations tend to make most of us uncomfortable. Initially our reluctance often stems from our fear that we are not going to do or say the right thing with the dying person.

If we can place our fears aside and rely on our natural instincts, our hearts will guide us. We already know how to take care of one other, this is instinctual. What can help is encouragement and roadmaps that will guide us as we embark upon a new personal journey as a caregiver to someone we deeply love or care for.

Fear arises from uncertainty, this is human nature. But having the right knowledge can help allay that fear. This series will expand awareness of what the caregiving journey will entail, allowing us to shine in this role. Contrary to popular belief that caring for the dying is depressing, most find it quite life-enriching.

It is also important to realize that caregiving requires the caregivers to nurture themselves as well. Otherwise stress can mount, making the journey most difficult. This is where hospice can be so valuable, providing a variety of resources to support the caregiver at this critical juncture.

It is my hope that this series will facilitate more dialogue about death within our society. As we relinquish our fear of death, our awareness of how to live will be reflected in greater compassion in the care of the dying.

*Greg Schneider
HEAL Project
Founding Director*

Caring for a Terminally-Ill Loved One:

Making Compassionate Choices – Series Overview



The HEAL Project was created as a direct result of HEAL Director Greg Schneider's personal experience as a volunteer caregiver for hospice residents at the Zen Hospice Project in San Francisco (www.zenhospice.org) since 1996, as well as caring for a family member who died. The dying teach those of us who bear witness as volunteer caregivers what is truly important in life. That is, to love one another and care for each other with

tenderness and compassion. The caregiving experience is one that can be transformative.

Because of the frequent expressions of awe and disbelief by the dying and their families that such a thing as a hospice could even exist, it became quite clear that a grassroots public education effort was needed to make more families aware of hospice and its benefits. While the goal of HEAL is to increase awareness about hospice through its **Community Outreach Program in Education (COPE)**, this particular series will focus on the various facets of caregiving starting with the diagnosis of a terminal illness through to death of the loved one and the bereavement period that follows.

The following is a brief outline of the topics to be covered for the remainder of this year:

[February] You & The Healthcare System – a discussion of healthcare options that will allow your loved one to die with dignity while providing assistance to you as a caregiver.

[March] Legal Considerations – the importance of advanced directives and how they can assist the family and caregiver in making critical end-of-life care decisions.

[April] What Is Hospice Care? – a brief history of hospice, philosophy of care, types of hospice support offered, financial considerations, and important resources available to you.

[May] Understanding The Dying Process – how societal acceptance of death impacts care, general disease progression and physical characteristics of end stage symptoms.

[June] Comfort Management – comfort of the dying person is the primary objective of hospice care. Physical, psycho-social, emotional and spiritual care elements are discussed.

[July] Nearing Death Awareness – the primary caregiver is the key communicator with family and friends. Ability to recognize cues that the dying person may soon be leaving can help others to be prepared for the imminent death of a loved one.

[August] Belief Systems - Faith & Spirituality – what role do faith and spirituality play in helping the dying person face death? How does it help family and caregivers?

[September] Grief of the Dying Person – what can we do to help the dying person with their grief? Life reviews, autobiographies and memorial service planning are discussed.

[October] Rituals Around Death – what role do rituals play and how can they be used to aid in the bereavement process? How do these rituals differ culturally?

[November] Bereavement Support - Continuing Your Life After Their Death – the stages of loss, how we deal with grief and bereavement resources available.

[December] Life After Caregiving – the choice to take on the caregiver role for a friend or loved one can be life-changing. Learn how it has affected others in a very positive way.

Accompanying stories will help illustrate the focus of each issue. Hopefully we can open a meaningful dialogue among readers at the HEAL Project website by sharing stories and reflecting on our own experiences.

The blazing evidence of immortality is our dissatisfaction with any other solution.

Ralph Waldo Emerson