

Reflection #29  
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### **Confronting Our Death Denying Culture**

Our death-denying culture affects the way that we react when faced with our own or a loved one's physical decline, mortality, and the death experience. Denial is a strong defense mechanism and serves a great purpose, however, it can be harmful, and rob family and friends of special moments at end of life.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented us an opportunity to have important and deep conversations about how we and our loved ones want to approach the end of life. This could be an uncomfortable discussion because of the fear of talking about death. Goals of Care at the end of life needs to be an ongoing discussion that allows honest conversation about what an individual wants as death approaches. Individuals and families do not need to do this alone. Speak Up Ontario is an excellent website full of helpful tools on how to have the discussion of Goals of Care at the end of life. Speak Up Ontario has excellent videos on how to start the conversation and how to put the Goals of Care in writing. The Speak Up movement has individual websites for each province respecting the different provincial laws.

This is the time to have this discussion. It is difficult to have end of life discussions in the unfamiliar environment of an ICU or Emergency Room at the time of an emotionally charged health crisis of a loved one.

When we plan for a vacation, we spend many hours thinking about where we want the journey to take us and how to get there. We research where we are going, update our passports, get travel insurance, and inform loved ones on our itinerary so that our journey will be exactly what we want. We also plan for any problems that may arise.

Having the discussion about Goals of Care allows all parties involved to reflect on their attitudes, values, and beliefs on dying. Sometimes this can cause conflict between loved ones as everyone articulates what is important to them. Discussions about Goals of Care in advance of a medical crisis allows for everyone to examine their attitudes, values, and beliefs so that they are not in competition with what your loved one wants.

Make discussions about Goals of Care a family event so that everyone is on the same page. If you experience bumps in the road, discuss it with your Health Care Team. They will be a good resource.

During the COVID-19 crisis...have many discussions about Goals of Care and go through the Speak Up Ontario website...together.

I highly recommend that families watch the video, "[To Dance with The White Dog](#)". An excellent story about how different generations of a farm family deal with the death of parents and grand parents.