

## **End-of-year focus on end-of-life options**

*By Ellen Waldman  
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Because this is the last column of the year, it seemed like a good time to reflect on the end of life.

I know this isn't a topic some people want to explore. But for many, this information will be very important. A client in his 90s recently told me his wife used to say there is a day we're born and a day we'll die. And prior to her passing a few years ago, this had informed their lives in very positive ways. They felt that each day was a time to focus on being kind to others and giving back for all the gifts received during their lives. Something we can all aspire to, I feel.

Dr. William Southworth, a retired local physician, suggested I attend the Oregon Geriatric Society conference in October. Last month, Dr. Southworth was awarded the 2019 Forsyth Community Health Award for his years of work in the community, including his volunteer service to Rogue Community Health. Another organization Bill has been volunteering with had an informational table set up at this conference, which is the focus of this column.

This nonprofit is called End of Life Choices Oregon ([eolcoregon.org](http://eolcoregon.org); 503-922-1132), and its tagline is "supporting Oregonians through end of life choices." You may think there are no choices when that time comes, but End of Life Choices Oregon wants you to know what's actually available to you.

Through the website, and with local volunteers, they can assist you in making decisions about your end of life transition. They offer professional guidance in understanding, accessing and utilizing Oregon's Death with Dignity Act, which allows medical assistance in dying. This is an entire subject of its own, but knowing it's an option provides a sense of empowerment and relief for people in very difficult medical situations. We are fortunate that this option is available, and End of Life Choices Oregon can be your guide and remain involved throughout the entire process. These are not choices made lightly, and having the right guidance means individuals and families are well informed and won't need to go it alone.

Although this is one of the main focuses of End of Life Choices Oregon, it also helps with other legal end of life options. On its website are resources to help with the advance directive and the POLST form (Physician's Orders for Life Sustaining Treatments). There is information on what is called voluntarily stopping eating and drinking (VSED) as another end of life choice. There is also information about accessing and utilizing hospice services. Because its mission is to support any of these choices, there is no judgment as to what works best for any individual, in conversations with their families and physicians.

In the past month, I have had two clients whose lives had ended after long illnesses. Given that they both had advanced dementia, they were not able to access the Death With Dignity option. However, they were able to bring hospice on board, and this made a huge difference. I also have been working with one family whose person is experiencing a serious medical condition that will not have a successful outcome following treatment. For them, being able to plan for and decide how to share these last times

together is vital. In this case, End of Life Choices Oregon is a wonderful option for help accessing Death with Dignity.

Bill Southworth shared that requests for access to Oregon's Death With Dignity Act by the terminally ill often come late in the process because people lacked sufficient knowledge about how to begin. As a result, they may have suffered longer. It is also not uncommon for End of Life Choices Oregon to be contacted by people already enrolled in hospice. All the hospice providers now refer patients who ask about Death With Dignity to the End of Life Choices Oregon intake number. From there, local volunteers can get involved.

Connecting through the website ([eolcoregon.org](http://eolcoregon.org)), you will have more understanding about what Oregon's laws and this organization provide in end of life choices.

As Dr. John Forsyth used to say, "Put your plans in place now while you can and then get back to living your life." Here's one more plan to consider, hopefully for the far distant future. Happy end of year to all.