

## **Aging Happens: It wouldn't kill you to talk about death**

*By Ellen Waldman*

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I recently attended a workshop on addressing end-of-life issues and planning for this time of life. Here's a quote from that workshop: "If talking about death shortened our life, there would be a reason not to talk about it."

Even though we know this is not the case, still we think there is something morbid or threatening about this discussion. It might even put a "jinx" on the person to mention death at all. Our culture has had an ambivalent relationship with this topic. This causes much stress and grief for families at a time when it's likely that they are already coping with a challenging situation.

Can we change this approach and incorporate this topic into our lives at a much less stressful time? I think we can, and here is one way to begin the investigation.

One local organization, COHO, Choosing Options Honoring Options, is holding its annual spring forum. This year, the topic is "Facing Mortality: The Elephant in the Room; Choosing Best Options for End-of Life Care."

There will be four separate presentations and one workshop. These will be held at the Smullin Health Education Center at the Rogue Regional Medical Center campus; 2825 E. Barnett Road. Each event has an afternoon session from 2 to 3:30 p.m., and one in the evening from 7 to 8:30 p.m. By the way, all these presentations are free to the public, and since COHO is a non-profit, they do welcome donations. Refreshments will be served.

Over the years, each separate series has been attended by at least 1,000 individuals. Clearly, there is a great deal of interest in these topics. Equally clear is that the manner in which they are presented by COHO has appeal and is very non-threatening.

The first presentation, called "Looking at the Life Cycle with Different Spiritual Traditions," begins this week on Thursday, Feb. 19. Seven different speakers from Christian, Catholic, Jewish and Buddhist backgrounds will describe their traditions' perspectives on the topic of life, death and dying.

On Thursday, Feb. 26, the topic will be "The Wisdom of Wit", with actor Megan Cole, an Oregon Shakespeare Festival alumna, starring in the leading role in this play. She originally created the program for medical students and physicians in training. Excerpts from the play will be used to dramatize this personal experience of dying.

For medical professionals (physicians, nurses, social workers, etc.) dealing with end-of-life issues, there is a separate event providing continuing medical education credits from 1 to 5 p.m. Feb. 27, for \$75. Cole will again provide a dramatized lecture and interactive performance. For this event only, call the Continuing Medical Education office at 541-789-4837 to register.

When people begin to consider what levels of intervention they will actually want at the end of their lives, the choices can be confusing. To help with this important decision, on Thursday, March 12, three

local physicians will speak about "Forks in the Road," which will address choosing between three different levels of treatment: full treatment, selective treatment and comfort care.

On Thursday, March 19, another presentation utilizing drama, called "Mom, not at Thanksgiving dinner! (Is there ever a good time for The Conversation?)," will be performed by COHO's Threshold Thespian Actors. The playwright is Peter Quince, and the play will address the sometimes avoided task of having the actual conversation about one's wishes at the end of life.

Whatever choice we make requires the filling out of two documents: the advance directive and a POLST (physician's orders for life sustaining treatment) forms. This final forum, on Thursday, April 16, is "Creating Your Advance Directive: A Workshop." Participants need to sign up in advance, and will be guided by Dr. John Forsyth in creating their own advance directive.

April 16 is also National Health Care Decisions Day, and a perfect time to finally put into writing what your wishes truly are. If you recently attended one or more of these forums, you will have information and tools to do just that.

For more details on any of these lectures, go to [www.cohoroguevalley.org](http://www.cohoroguevalley.org) or call 541-292-6466. When you attend, think about bringing along a friend. After all, there is no harm talking about any of this. It may, in fact, bring you and those you love some real sense of relief.