HEALTH CARE AND END-OF-LIFE CHOICES

According to the Institute of Medicine, the nation’s health care system will need to undergo FUNDAMENTAL CHANGES as the proportion of older adults in the U.S. grows.

ADVANCED DIRECTIVE: Also known as a living will, an advance directive documents a person’s wishes regarding medical treatment in the event they can’t communicate their wishes themselves.
- Only about ONE THIRD of adults have an advance directive expressing their wishes for end-of-life care. [AARP]
- A 2011 Time/CNN poll found that 70 PERCENT of Americans want to die at home—however, 70 PERCENT of the population is dying in hospitals, nursing homes or long-term care facilities. [CDC]

PALLIATIVE CARE: Specialized medical care for people with serious illness that focuses on providing relief from the symptoms and stress of that illness and improve quality of life.
- Unlike hospice care, which aims to provide symptom relief and comfort during end of life, PALLIATIVE CARE IS APPROPRIATE AT ANY STAGE in a serious illness and can be provided alongside disease treatment.
- The USC Davis School and Blue Shield of California recently received a $5 million contract from the Patient-Centered Outcomes Research Institute to provide and study outpatient palliative care. Earlier studies have suggested that palliative care is associated with IMPROVED QUALITY OF LIFE, FEWER HOSPITALIZATIONS and LOWER COSTS.
  - Upon learning what palliative care is, 97 PERCENT of individuals state that they would want to receive it in the event of a serious illness. [Time/CNN]

HEALTH CARE STEREOTYPE THREAT:
When individuals with stigmatized identities—race, socioeconomic status, gender, age, sexual orientation, or even weight or maternal age—worry about being judged by a stereotype in healthcare settings, causing anxiety and affecting their healthcare experience.
- A USC-led study showed that people who experienced health care stereotype threat were MORE LIKELY to have hypertension, to be depressed, and to rate their own health more poorly.

POLYPHARMACY:
The simultaneous use of multiple medications.
- The chance of an adverse drug reaction is 90 PERCENT in patients taking more than eight prescriptions. [American Academy of Family Physicians]
- More than ONE THIRD of prescription drugs in the U.S. are taken by older adults. The average elderly individual is taking more than FIVE prescription medications; a nursing home patient is taking SEVEN medications on average. [AARP]

EXPERTS

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