

National Healthcare Decision Day

OSF HealthCare Newsroom

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The saying goes, “in this world, nothing is certain except death and taxes.” For that reason, April 16 - the day after the traditional Tax Day - is designated as National Healthcare Decisions Day, a day set aside to encourage people to have discussions with loved ones about advance care planning and sharing your wishes for future health care.

According to findings from a new, [nationwide study](#), 68 percent of those responding say it's important or very important to discuss their wishes but only 55-and-a-half percent have had those discussions. Even more concerning, just over 35-percent of respondents have actually documented their wishes.

Dawn Lemmert, MD, is the director of medical services for OSF Home Care, part of the Peoria, Illinois-based OSF HealthCare, with 15 hospitals throughout Illinois and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan and one of the largest Catholic health care systems in Illinois.

Dr. Lemmert says each person has their own, personal feelings about what the death journey should look like. And unless that conversation takes place between them and their family, their wishes may never come to fruition.

SOT Dr. Dawn Lemmert, Director of Medical Services – OSF Home Care

(First, a health care power of attorney or a surrogate needs to be identified, and that is a very intimate and personal choice by the patient. That choice needs to be made first and that person needs to be on the same page as the patient and willing to put forth what that patient wants. :24)

Dr. Lemmert adds not making your wishes clear can cause a lot of stress for family members left behind. Understanding what your loved one wants can help alleviate any fights.

SOT Dr. Dawn Lemmert, Director of Medical Services – OSF Home Care

(All of us are going to die. We just don't know, perhaps, why we're going to die or how we're going to die. Discussing what level of care do you want? Do you want CPR? Do you want to be intubated? Do you want artificial feeds? All of that needs to be clearly spelled out so that there is absolutely no misconception along that entire journey. :24)

Dr. Lemmert works with skilled and long-term care facilities which, in many cases, had to deal with some very difficult end-of-life discussions and decisions during the height of the lockdowns in the early months of the COVID-19 pandemic. Loved ones were not allowed into facilities to prevent the spread of the virus, while their loved ones with other medical challenges were getting sick and, sometimes, dying.

SOT Dr. Dawn Lemmert, Director of Medical Services – OSF Home Care

(We were making very rapid decisions under very stressful times. That can be avoided. If we start those conversations *now*, have it *now*. I'm not calling you and telling you in 15 minutes I need an answer because your mom's not doing well. And all of that could be avoided. :24)

Lest you think this is a conversation for those who are older, Dr. Lemmert says it is not. Nor is it a one-and-done type of conversation either.

SOT Dr. Dawn Lemmert, Director of Medical Services – OSF Home Care

(What do you want in the event that something catastrophic happens to you? Because we don't know - we could be hit by a car. You could be on a bike ride and fall and hit your head and now you're non-decisional. What do we do? So it really is not just at a terminal illness stage. It needs to be integrated into the normal approach to the care of the patient. :27)

SOT Dr. Dawn Lemmert, Director of Medical Services – OSF Home Care

(This conversation should span a certain period of time. This is not a one-time conversation. This is not a conversation that you save until you're 80 or 90. This is a conversation that we need to back that conversation up and start having it sooner so that we can have the greatest impact on quantity and quality of life. :22)

If you are having trouble getting the conversation started, considering including your primary care provider to help break the ice in a protected setting.

Learn more about advance care planning services at OSF HealthCare [here](#) or by calling (844) 673-2778.