

# Making Life Better

## Conversations That Can Create Future Peace Of Mind

(NAPSA)—You may be able to save yourself and your loved ones from having to make a difficult decision at a terrible time.

Choosing how to spend your final days is not something to decide in a moment. After all, no one wants to be scrambling for paperwork, evaluating care choices or putting their families through uncertainty.

It's possible, however, to make those last days some of the best days, but it does require planning, reflection and a willingness to have thoughtful conversations before those final days arrive.

Yet, according to a survey from the California HealthCare Foundation, while 60 percent of people feel it's "extremely important" to avoid burdening their family with tough medical decisions, 56 percent have not communicated their end-of-life wishes.

Dr. James Mittelberger, Chief Medical Officer at Optum Palliative and Hospice Care, points out that when it comes to end-of-life care, a conversation can make all the difference for many patients and their families.

"These are important conversations, not to be put off until tragedy or a serious illness. By having the conversation with your family early, you can help ensure that your future health care is based on your wishes," said Dr. Mittelberger. "Talking to your doctor or nurse will be an important part of the process, but it all starts with a conversation with the people you love."

He offers these tips:

• **Consider your loved ones.**

Honest communication can help families avoid the stress of guessing what a family member would have wanted. You may find that



**Talking about end-of-life care wishes now can help you and your loved ones make the right decisions when the time comes.**

you and your loved ones may see some things differently. That's okay. Be open with each other and focus on really understanding the views of those you love.

• **Think about what is most important to you.** As a patient, what are your greatest fears, hopes and goals? Who would you prefer to make decisions on your behalf with your physicians if you could not? How sure are you of your choices? Do you want your chosen proxy to have leeway to change your decisions? Discuss these topics with your loved ones to reach a shared understanding of your desires.

• **Make it official.** Once you've had the conversation, formalize your decisions by putting them in writing. There are several ways. An advance directive can help describe your medical wishes when you no longer can. Special medical orders can be developed with your doctor. Finally, a health care proxy identifies your health care agent—the person you trust to act on your behalf if you are unable to make decisions or communicate your wishes.

• **Get help.** You can find valuable resources to help you think through these issues and make decisions more manageable at [www.optumhospice.com/conversations](http://www.optumhospice.com/conversations).