



# The Three Wishes Demonstration Project: Towards Dying with Dignity in the ICU

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## BACKGROUND

The death of critically ill patients in the technological ICU setting can be depersonalizing. The **overall goal** of the 3 Wishes Demonstration Project is to improve the quality of the dying experience for patients & their families

Our **specific aims** are:

- 1) **For patients**, to dignify their death and celebrate their lives
- 2) **For family members**, to humanize the dying process and create positive memories
- 3) **For clinicians**, to foster patient-centered and family-centered end of life care & inspire a deeper sense of their vocation

## METHODS

**Design & Setting:** Mixed-methods demonstration project in an academic 23 bed medical-surgical closed ICU

**Participants:** To date, 30 patients have been enrolled. For each patient enrolled we aim to interview one family member or friend and 3 clinicians [nurse, physician, respiratory therapist, physiotherapist, dietitian, chaplain or social worker] who cared for the dying patient in the last 72 hours of their life

**Quantitative data:** Demographics, processes of care (administration, withholding and withdrawal of life support), & Quality End of Life Care-10 instrument

**Three Wishes** Were sensitively elicited to honour the patient and family, documented in terms of what, when, where, why, how and by whom

**Qualitative data:** Semi-structured interviews of 1 family member or friend and 3 clinicians per patient, transcribed verbatim, then analyzed using a qualitative descriptive approach and content analysis

**Wish Categories & Examples**

Humanizing the Environment	Tributes	Family Reconnections	Rituals and Observances	Paying it Forward
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Personal moment</li> <li>Pet therapy</li> <li>Flowers</li> <li>Favourite music or TV program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Word Cloud</li> <li>Breakfast tribute</li> <li>Memorial meal</li> <li>Toast</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Locating lost son</li> <li>Lying with dying relative</li> <li>Burial preference</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wedding</li> <li>Prayer</li> <li>Renewed wedding vows</li> <li>Expedited body to mosque</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Organ donation</li> <li>Donation to favourite charity</li> <li>Donation to 3 Wishes Program</li> </ul>

**Example Word Cloud Reprinted With Permission:**

**“My mother taught me many things in her life. Her final lesson tome would be about compassion, taught to me through the compassion I received from friends and family. And the compassion of perfect strangers -- the doctors, nurses and support staff of St. Joseph's Hospital”**  
[Family member]

**“Every time we've had a patient who's been enrolled it has a very interesting effect on how you view you patients...especially patients who are unable to express wishes themselves and we have family who are expressing wishes for them..... trying to give us an idea of what kind of person they were. I think it really humanizes people who are unable to speak for themselves, who are unable to communicate with the team”**  
[Resident]

**“It gave the whole family a voice. I feel because it's almost like they could come up with their wishes together and it helped..... everybody put into perspective what Mr. M wanted and not what everybody else wanted for him”**  
[Resident]

## RESULTS

### The 3 Wishes Demonstration Project

- is a model for compassionate inter-professional end of life care, encouraging reflective practice
- shifts cultural attitudes about end of life care by empowering participants to explore and embrace spirituality, regardless of culture, religion, or social group
- offers experiential learning about palliative care for clinicians-in-training

### Wishes were

- Antemortem (62%) or postmortem (38%)
- Low cost ('invaluable'/nil) or higher cost (\$200/patient)
- Spiritual (broadly so) or practical (will completion)

**Participants** universally endorsed encoding this Demonstration Project into practice. The clinician interview response rate was 88/90 (98%). Of 17 families contacted 1-6 months post-mortem, all have agreed and been interviewed. Mean family-reported EOL-10 scores were 9.4 of 10

## CONCLUSIONS

This 3 Wishes Demonstration Project promotes the key concept of death with dignity in a technological environment. The process of eliciting and implementing the 3 Wishes helps to repersonalize the dying process for patients, families and clinicians. The concept of enabling the wishes encourages humanism and addresses matters of faith in the ICU. The 3 Wishes Demonstration Project also reflects the integration of palliative care and critical care medicine.

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