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

M Swinton, F Clarke, N Zyataruk, F Toledo, A Boyle, A Woods, RD Sheppard, DJ Cook

BACKGROUND

The death of critically ill patients in the technological ICU setting can be depersonalizing. The overall goal of the Three 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

The Three Wishes Demonstration Project:

1. is a model for compassionate inter-professional end of life care, encouraging reflective practice
2. shifts cultural attitudes about end of life care by empowering participants to explore and embrace spirituality, regardless of culture, religion, or social group
3. 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.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We would like to express our gratitude to the family members and clinicians who participated in the interviews for this project.

Funding: Hamilton Academy of Health Sciences of Ontario, Canadian Intensive Care Foundation, private donations to the St. Joseph’s Healthcare Foundation. D Cook is a Research Chair of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.