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Dealing with dementia as a terminal illness

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The Deathtalker (Author), Australia

Western cultures are notoriously death denying and this applies equally to people in later life who are often living with multiple chronic illnesses, dementia being one. Dementia, though known to be a terminal illness is rarely discussed as such and the grief a person and their family experience on receipt of a diagnosis of dementia is often under explored by health professionals. Why is this? Health professionals often feel ill-equipped to undertake difficult conversations with patients and their families, and so their grief goes un-addressed and end of life issues remain unexplored until the person enters the active dying or imminent death phase, at which time both the person and their family are ill-prepared for the palliative nature of the care that is now appropriate. In order to provide the best level of care and quality of life for people living with dementia, it is essential for health professionals to assist them to explore their values, their fears and apprehensions and to understand what a good death and high level of quality of life looks like for each individual diagnosed with dementia. This presentation will explore the importance of advance care planning, holistic care and exemplary end of life care (including exploring the issues of grief and loss) for people and their families living with dementia and the road blocks that currently exist that prevent these conversations from happening early in the illness trajectory.

Biography

Molly Carlile AM is a multi-award winning international speaker, author and specialist in the field of palliative care, grief and loss, education and community development. She has a significant clinical background and has held senior leadership roles in acute and community healthcare in addition to sitting on numerous health service boards, department of health advisory committees and academic committees in both nursing and palliative care. She has won local, national and international awards for her work in the field and was awarded a Member of the Order of Australia for her contribution to palliative care. She has presented her papers at national and international conferences for the past 10 years, is a regular media commentator and is currently working on her third book about *death and grief*.

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