

Tip sheet : Medically Induced Longevity

Many frail elders are surviving years beyond their natural lifespan because of **Medically Induced Longevity**. Medically Induced Longevity means medical interventions in elders that prolong life, but not quality of life, and may result in considerable suffering, expense, and long term disability.

Elders (and yes, younger folks) may not have considered the full implications of postponing death as long as possible. The family may be hiding realities of the situation from the elder:

- Is the boomer's health failing because s/he is trying to do it all?
- Are boomer siblings in conflict over what to do about elder care?
- Is boomer job security threatened by elder care?
- Does a year or two in a nursing home mean that there won't be funds for a grandchild to go to college?

How does a boomer help an elder explore the option of rejecting medically induced longevity?

Elders often open the door when they talk about their diminished quality of life:

- Do they comment about loss of mobility, pain, inability to get out?
- Are their medications becoming ridiculous – medications to treat side effects of medications?
- Does their life seem to revolve around a series of uncomfortable treatments?
- Do they ever question why a doctor orders this test or that procedure?
- Are their friends, spouse and neighbors already gone?
- Do they ever voice readiness to move on?
- Do they express fear that they will outlive their money?

Rather than respond, "Oh Mom, you'll outlive us all!"

- Do some thinking about this for yourself so that you can share what you are planning!!!!
- "Some people think of dying as "giving up" others think of it as "completing the life cycle". How do you view it?"
- "We all have a finite time on this earth. I want to xxx before I die. What would you like to do with the time you have left?" Formulate a plan to re-allocate medical co-pays into that autumn trip to New England they've always wanted!
- If money is a concern: "That's a valid concern, Dad. Ben and I are really concerned about that ourselves. I'm really wondering what will happen to (grandkids) if 78 million baby boomers are kept alive into our 90's by modern medicine. Many of us haven't saved at all, and those of us who have, have seen our nest eggs crushed with the stock market. We can't afford to live that long! Future generations are inheriting enormous problems."
- Discuss circumstances of loved ones that have "died well" vs. "died as a medical failure."
- I bought you this book: *From Age-ing to Sage-ing*; it's about the spiritual work of the elder. Perhaps you could start a book club." (This is a great book for boomers, too!)
- "Are people at your church (faith community) willing to talk about death? Do you have friends you can talk to about it? Why don't you start a discussion group to talk about what you'd like to have as you pass/cross over/transition?"
- "Are there things you still need to accomplish to put your affairs in order?"
- "Let's look at your Five Wishes (Living Will) and see if it still reflects how much medical care you want vs. how comfortable you want to be at the end of life (or 'as you transition into the next the next world')."
- **No Living Will? Start here!!!!** Order "Five Wishes" for All Adults (over 18) in your family www.agingwithdignity.org
- Hopefully this will lay the groundwork for a family meeting. Keep attendance to the immediate family: elders and their boomer children. While you have the serious dialogue, mates and assorted in-laws can be recruited to be preparing a "we did it" or "exit fiesta" feast and celebration where you all fill out "Five Wishes." And celebrate you should - this is a family milestone!