



Margaret and Ellen: Good conversations lead to a good transition from life

Ellen was the Chief Nursing Officer at her community hospital. She and her mother, Margaret, had many good conversations about Margaret's wishes for care throughout her life and Ellen was determined to respect them, follow them, and carry them out as her mother's representative when she could no longer speak for herself.

As Margaret's health declined from terminal cancer, her doctors kept coming to Ellen with potentially life extending treatments, but Ellen knew that her mother's wish was to have quality of life as much as possible to the end. The treatments they offered had the possibility of extending her life by days or months, but there would be no quality and she would likely die in the hospital, which is was the last thing Margaret wanted.

Despite being secure in knowing her mother's wishes, the doctor's entreaties to "try one more thing" left Ellen plagued with guilt and anxiety. As she said,

"I knew as a nurse that doctors will always have another treatment, but they don't always take into consideration quality of life considerations because their job is to treat. It was up to me to carry out mom's wishes, but I don't know what I would have done if I wasn't a nurse. I felt I was in good standing to argue for my mother's directives, but I'm not so sure I would have had the backbone needed to do that if I hadn't been around the medical world for so long."

Some Doctors have a hard time giving up. There is always one more medication, one more treatment to try. Patients' wishes about how they want to live out their final days may not be well understood. It's important to have a strong advocate (especially someone with your Medical Power of Attorney) representing **your wishes** who completely understands you, **sees things from your point of view (not their own)** and is strong enough to stand up for you, ideally in a diplomatic way. No one wants tension, but it's **your wishes** that must be honored, and no one else's.