Evolutionary Pathway to a Good Death

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In 2011 authors Keegan and Drick published *End of Life: Nursing Solutions for Death with Dignity* (New York: Springer Publishing) proposing the next evolution in end of life care. Hospice care began in the 1960’s with both hospice and palliative care advancing greatly since then. This book builds upon that history and speaks to the evolution of the new possible in the 21st century. The title was welcomed by many schools of nursing and went on to win two American Journal of Nurses’ Book of the Year Awards, one in Gerontology, the other in Hospice and Palliative Care.

Not being satisfied speaking only to professionals the authors proceeded to publish a similar book but this time, directed to the lay public. *The Golden Room: A Practical Guide for Death with Dignity* (2013) presents clear, descriptive concept of what happens at end of life and offers alternatives about new possibilities in the last few weeks of life.

“Golden Rooms” or “Golden Room Centers” are proposed as special places for those within 3-10 days of dying. *Golden Rooms* can exist in acute care hospitals, nursing homes, assisted living centers, and in free-standing dedicated end-of-life centers. Central to *Golden Rooms* is a shift in the way we view death. Rather than a tragedy to be avoided at all costs, death is accepted as inevitable for us all and a meaningful release of the spirit from the physical world.

In place of being at home with relatives who often can’t cope or in sterile, impersonal acute care environments, filled with loud machinery, invasive tubes and rushing personnel, *Golden Rooms* are envisioned as beautiful, comfortable and relaxing places, designed to ease and dignify the passage from life to death. Specially-trained staff offers a full range of complimentary therapies, such as massage, aromatherapy, music, acupuncture, visualization, as well as conventional pharmaceutical pain management, and psychological and spiritual support. Comforting, uplifting art work on the wall, murals on the ceiling, and sound proof, wall coverings and fabric suggest a cozy, warm, restful setting. Families who are able to be part of the dying process can stay in guest beds provided in each customizable private room.
Communication, the Key to Change

Awareness about and professional’s use of recommendations for where to receive end-of-life care is still low. These communication deficits are important sources of conflicts within ICU teams and with patients or families. Most people require guidance about end-of-life care to help them to make effective end-of-life decisions. Projects that promote direct contact of care team members with patients/families may be more likely to improve care than educational interventions for caregivers only. For example, many family responses to critical illness generally includes adverse psychological outcome (postintensive care syndrome-family).

Information brochures and structured communication protocols are likely to improve engagement of family members in surrogate decision-making. Intervention strategies should be interdisciplinary, multi-professional and family-centered in order to quickly reach these goals. (Wiedermann CJ, Lehner GF, & Joannidis M., 2012). Other authors document a number of factors that block the path to a good death. Some contend that fear of death and the stigma associated with the terminal events of illness prevents us from dying well. A second consideration is the lack of recognition and use of palliative and hospice care leads many to die a pathetic death in ICU. Authors Bhatnagar and Joshi (2012) declare we must break the taboo of conversations around death and start talking about this terminal sequence (good death) of good living. This perspective mirrors Keegan and Drick’s point of view of conscious awareness aids the healthy conscious dying process.

The more we know about the death and dying, the more comfortable we become. Knowing doesn’t take the sting of loss and sadness away. Knowing does help us to prepare so everyone can move through death and dying with a higher degree of comfort and understanding. Knowledge also brings comfort in the form of feeling more ready to begin conversations. This book is a conversation opener for family and friends by providing basic ideas of what to expect and how to plan for rich golden year’s right up to the end. It is a guide beyond the medical. It is about life; death is a part of it.

Death comes unbidden to all of us. For many it is one of the most difficult things to talk or think about especially since our society has moved us away from the place of importance that death once held. Today death is a subject that is not part of normal conversation. It is not a happy thought; it is uncomfortable and scary to many.
The Golden Room gives readers the opportunity to explore the facts and understand the process of dying. It offers **guidance** to what one can do to make the process smoother and easier. It offers **information** for making decisions based on knowledge rather than in the throes of emotions. This book **empowers** one to walk with death and dying knowing that you have value and worth that you are prepared and everything will fall into place in the most kind and gentle manner as possible.

The health care system is begging for innovative, cost effective changes that enhance quality of life. We the people are ready for a shift back to individual worth and dignity. That makes this book relevant to everyone as we will all die. There are no exceptions. This book plants seeds of what **SHOULD** be. Death with dignity is everyone’s right. Keegan and Drick’s mission is to empower everyone who reads this little book to realize that they can prepare for the inevitable. We are not powerless nor does fear have to immobilize us. The more of us who advocate for a “good death” the better off all of us will be. Find their book at [Amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com): *The Golden Room: A Practical Guide for Death with Dignity (9781481990370): Lynn Keegan, Carole Ann Drick*., order it from any book store, then go to their web page [www.GoldenRoomAdvocates.org](http://www.GoldenRoomAdvocates.org) and join the advocates to create the army of change. Together we can make a difference.

**Notes**


