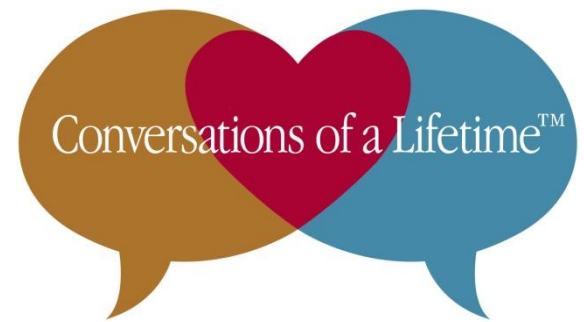


Conversations of a Lifetime Frequently Asked Questions



What is the *Conversations of a Lifetime* project?

Conversations of a Lifetime is an initiative by Hospice of Cincinnati to transform end-of-life care in Greater Cincinnati and improve end-of-life experiences. The program encourages earlier end-of-life planning conversations among physicians, patients and families. [Bethesda Inc.](#) and [Catholic Health Initiatives](#) (CHI) are funders of the initiative with a \$2.3 million, three-year grant.

What are “end-of-life” decisions?

End-of-life decisions are those that address how you would want to live your last days: the kind of care that you would want, what kind of extraordinary measures (if any) you would want, and what matters most to you. The *Conversations of a Lifetime* website ([Conversations of a Lifetime™](#)) guides people through steps that help ask and answer these important questions.

How long will the project last?

This is a three-year project that began in April 2013. Planning and development of key components took place in 2013, with a formal kick-off in February 2014. Project activities will continue through the end of 2015. Our intention is that the initiative and the lessons learned will continue long past the end of the three-year grant period.

Why did Bethesda Inc. and Catholic Health Initiatives fund the grant for this project?

Bethesda Inc. and Catholic Health Initiatives believe this project has the potential to transform how end-of-life care decisions are made and carried out in our community. Conversations vary widely based on an individual doctor’s experience and beliefs, and the community’s receptiveness in talking about end-of-life. This project seeks to equip physicians with the skills and support to initiate and follow up on end-of-life conversations. The result will be to ease the emotional and practical difficulties of having these important conversations in the physician’s office, while also supporting patients and families during a very critical time.

Why is this project so important?

We know from research, and from our staff, that many people aren’t having the end-of-life experience they would have wanted (see our Fact Sheet for supporting research data.) Often, this happens because patients have not clearly communicated their end-of-life wishes to their loved ones and physicians. This dishonors the life of the patient, and creates undue stress and tension for caregivers and families, while incurring unnecessary costs. Fostering open and honest discussion is critical in helping every family have the end-of-life experience they desire.

Why are you starting this project now?

Medical care for people at the end of life has changed drastically over the decades. Medical advancements have multiplied, giving medical providers more opportunities to do what they are trained to do – save and extend lives. The choices – and situations – can be overwhelming to patients and their families. Without clear direction and input on the patient’s directives, medical providers are most likely to take either the safest and/or most aggressive route.

Haven't advance directives and living wills been around a long time? Don't most people have them?

Despite the development of advance directives and living wills, most people have yet to specify in writing what their wishes are. According to a survey of U.S. adults by the Pew Research Center in 2013, 62 percent have talked with someone about their own wishes, while *only 35 percent have written down their wishes*.

Conversations of a Lifetime is about far more than advance directives and living wills. This project encourages people to talk about their wishes in great detail. It also provides the health care system with very specific details and documentation about the patient's end-of-life wishes, which are then activated by health care providers when the patient reaches his or her final days.

Who should be having the "Conversation?"

In this project, physicians will be coached on how to initiate discussions with patients who have been diagnosed with chronic or potentially terminal medical conditions. However, our goal is also to create a "conversation-ready" community. Everyone, regardless of their health status, should consider having these conversations with their loved ones. Without a conversation, the burden is placed on your next-of-kin or health care proxy to "guess" what you would want when a crisis occurs.

©2014 Hospice of Cincinnati