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TALKING ABOUT DYING AND DEATH

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Objectives This presentation will report on research commissioned by a hospice in England and work done to promote meaningful discussion about this sensitive topic. Since 2008, the hospice has run a series of events to encourage people to be more open. Two panel discussions have been held, entitled 'Dying & Death: Let's Talk about It', which have resulted in good attendance and constructive dialogue. In addition, the local university was commissioned to identify perceptions surrounding talking about dying and death.

Focus groups Two focus groups explored viewpoints from the general public and practitioners. The focus group sessions were facilitated, audio-recorded, transcribed, coded and analysed by researchers.

Panel discussion The panels consisted of people such as writers, poets, academics, vicars, medical consultants and journalists; the audience was invited to ask questions.

Results Four conceptual themes were identified from the focus groups:

- ▶ Emotions, beliefs and behaviours
- ▶ Coping with adversity
- ▶ Difficulties, barriers and tensions
- ▶ Fostering a participative future.

The panel discussions produced dialogue around issues such as the role of religion in death, what constitutes a good death and euthanasia.

Conclusions A lack of openness together with a 'live forever' mindset contributed to a cultural shift where the inevitable isn't discussed; which hinders advance care planning and adversely affects the grieving process. Dying and death was articulated as an upsetting and taboo topic. Some practitioners take the view that they "do not want to upset patients" and choose avoidance, while others are drawn to talking as an integral aspect of their role. Dying people often want the opportunity to talk through their wishes, though such discussions with the 'general public' can be more problematic.

Recommendations Hospices are advocated to address the need for more outreach events in the community and wider education and training for all.