

Hospice of Northwest Ohio Engages Physicians to Positively Impact the Patient and Family Experience Related to End-of-Life Care

Dedicated to caring for the terminally ill since 1981, Hospice of Northwest Ohio is the Toledo area's largest provider of hospice care. As a non-profit, community-based organization, its mission is to provide specialized medical, emotional, and spiritual care to people of all ages (and their families) living with any end-stage illness. Their vision: To positively transform the way people view and experience the end of life.



The business need

Even with the rigorous training medical schools provide, it wasn't until 2000 that end-of-life care became a requirement for new doctors. Handling the difficult and emotional situations when patients face the end of their lives presents a unique set of challenges and is very different from learning how to cure patients. It is a universal concern among hospices everywhere, as they hear story after story of patients waiting too long to seek their services and having median lengths of service on their programs measured in days instead of the six months covered by Medicare.

So, it was one more similar concern when Hospice of Northwest Ohio received an anonymous letter from a family who had a very distressing end-of-life care experience – in another city – due to poor communication from physicians. However, that letter came with a very generous donation and a request to utilize it for a specific and crucial purpose: to fund endeavors that would educate physicians and medical students about the dying process, so no one would have to endure what their family did.

Hospice of Northwest Ohio needed an approach that would engage doctors and medical providers as the true drivers of change. They needed to engage physicians at an emotional level, facilitating a deep connection regarding how they personally affect the end-of-life experience for patients and their families. The more they could tap into the hearts and minds of students and doctors, the bigger the impact.

The solution

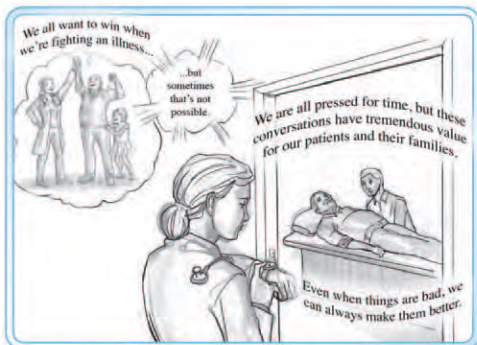
Hospice of Northwest Ohio knew that to relate to its audience, it needed a visual approach that shed light on how difficult the end-of-life process is for patients and families and to show it from their perspective. If the physicians knew how truly beneficial a positive experience could be for everyone involved, they'd be more likely to buy into the program and commit to it. Hospice of Northwest Ohio worked with Root Inc. to create a multifaceted approach:

“The end-of-life process of a loved one is an emotional journey and so complicated in nature. It's important that in conjunction with top-notch medical care, patients and their families receive emotional and spiritual support as well. Unfortunately, for many families, timely conversations about this opportunity are never held, and they miss out on the things that could have made their end-of-life journey a far better experience.”

— Judy Seibenick,
Executive Director,
Hospice of Northwest
Ohio



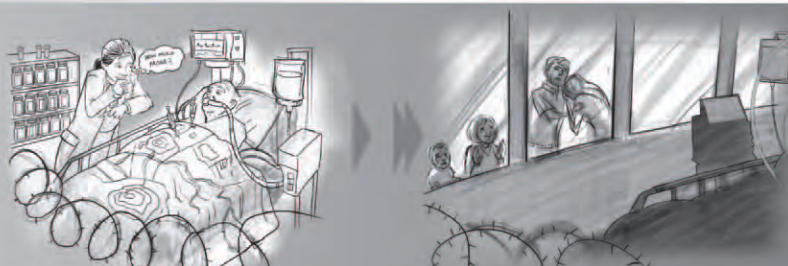
- In the film, you heard physicians speak about their reasons for becoming doctors. Think back to the time prior to medical school and your reasons for becoming a doctor. How have your views of being a doctor changed during your career?
- When you look for a physician for yourself or a family member, what qualities do you look for?
- It can be difficult to be empathetic 100% of the time. What might be helpful to you in connecting with patients, especially when it doesn't come naturally?



What should I do?



- Think about the stories the family members shared in the film, as well as experiences you and your family have had with serious illness and end-of-life decisions. What do you remember about the physician communications in those times – both positive and negative? What was the impact on you and your family?
 - Reflect on what your own priorities would be if you were facing the end of life. How do your priorities affect your perspective of approaching end-of-life conversations with your patients?
- Based upon what you've heard in the film, what do you think are some basic requirements for an effective end-of-life conversation?
 - Consider the comment that sometimes in fighting serious illness the patient "becomes the battlefield." What does that mean to you? Can you describe a situation when you have seen that happen?
 - What will you do differently regarding end-of-life conversations after this experience?



Creating an emotional connection through video

The visual and auditory elements of cinematic storytelling poignantly convey the deep emotion involved with end-of-life conversations. Using visual tools helped participants realize the raw beauty that exists in a process when handled correctly. For this particular video, the team culled a variety of specialists representing the medical population. Family members who had experienced the death of a loved one were also included. The video captured personal stories from every perspective to show an emotional, cohesive picture of the whole process and how end-of-life care touches everyone involved. During different segments of the video, there are opportunities to pause for group discussion and reaction to what viewers are seeing and hearing. The video closes with a segment on hope and the role everyone plays in redefining hope as part of exceptional end-of-life care.

Creating push and pull through a website and continuing medical education

Root Inc. worked with the medical director at Hospice of Northwest Ohio to develop an End-of-Life Conversations website. The website serves as a valuable resource offering additional video footage, links to other pertinent information on the topic, and a logged-in view enabling individuals to take a more detailed course, and then take a test to earn Continuing Medical Education credits for completing the training. The content was designed to set the appropriate tone through an easy-to-use site.

People are truly moved by the content, and the video consistently draws overwhelmingly positive feedback. The video contains dialogue that many people can relate to on a personal level, and that puts the End-of-Life Conversation process in perspective.

Sustaining and reinforcing through a Strategic Learning Mat

Hospice of Northwest Ohio also included a Strategic Learning Mat in its training. This is a scaled-down version of Root Inc.'s full *Strategic Learning Map*® module. The mat encouraged continued conversation based on individual and personal reflections related to the video content.

Results

The overall goal of End-of-Life Conversations is to have as many doctors and medical students as possible watch the video and improve their skillsets around the topic. The video has been aired at various meetings locally around Ohio and in other places around the country. People are truly moved by the content, and the video consistently draws overwhelmingly positive feedback. The video contains dialogue that many people can relate to on a personal level, and that puts the End-of-Life Conversation process in perspective.

From the participants:

"This was fantastic! I discovered that I still had feelings!"

"It was great to speak to more experienced physicians and learn from their experiences."

"Very thought provoking!"

"I enjoyed the group discussion."

Hospice of Northwest Ohio is developing partnerships with leading hospitals and other medical service providers to disseminate the training to their employees. Additional exposure is planned through a variety of channels including hospitals, medical events, lunch-and-learn sessions at medical practices, and more. The video and accompanying web resources will also be offered to large non-profit hospice centers in every state.

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About Root

Root is a strategy execution company that helps organizations engage people as a catalyst for change using a proven framework that consistently achieves clarity, ownership, and results.



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