My life, My choices

Telling people what matters to me at the end of my life.
"I don't want to put it to the back of my mind. In fact it's at the front of my mind. It makes me make the most of life"

Why bother?

For most of us, talking about death and dying does not come easy, and even if we were open to talking with others, what would we talk about? However, talking to someone about how you would like to be cared for at the end of your life, about the kind of funeral you'd like, or even how you would like to be remembered could be really helpful. If this is something you have thought about or would like to consider then this leaflet may help you to tell others what matters to you.

You may wish to talk about some of the things below with someone you care about, or perhaps a healthcare professional looking after you.
It's very important that you don't feel under pressure to talk.

You can decide how much or how little you want to say and when.
Where and how I want to be cared for

"I want to die here, with my friends around me"

Thinking about where and how you would like to be cared for, especially if your health begins to deteriorate, is very important. For instance, you may wish to be cared for at home, or you may want to consider moving to somewhere else. Letting staff or others know of your wishes as early on as possible is important, as your care may require some planning. While it is not always possible for people to be cared for at home until the end of their life, talking with others early on can ensure that everybody is doing their best to make it happen.

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Making myself heard

"What if I can’t speak for myself?"

You may wish to refuse specific types of treatments. This is known as an **advance decision to refuse treatment**, for example, Do Not Resuscitate (DNR). It must be discussed with a medical professional who is fully aware of your medical history. An advance decision will only be used if you lose ability to make your own decisions about your treatment, and must be in writing, signed and witnessed. The only treatments you can’t refuse are ‘basic care’: this means nursing care, relief of pain and other symptoms, and food and drink by mouth.

Did you know you can also appoint someone who can speak for you, if you become unable to make decisions yourself? This is called **power of attorney**. They can be someone you know very well who can ensure that others, particularly health care professionals involved in your care, know your wishes. Registering someone as an attorney is a legal process and there can be costs involved, so it is important to get advice from someone with legal knowledge.

Did you know you can also appoint someone who can speak for you, if you become unable to make decisions yourself? This is called **power of attorney**.
Other things to talk about

5 things to do before I die
You might like to make a list of the things you have always wanted to do but never got round to doing and then talk it through with others. Some things might not be possible, but nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Reconnecting with others
You may wish to reconnect with people whom you haven’t seen for some time, or who there may be difficulties with. This could be family members or friends. Making contact with some people may be too difficult or painful, but it is always good to know the choices you can make about who to reconnect with and when.

“When dad died I was able to make amends/peace. I’m really glad we did that”
Five things to do before I die

1. 
2. 
3. 
4. 
5. 
How I’d like to be remembered

"Funerals are morbid, with all their ceremony and I’m not religious. I like the thought of woodland burials. They’re cheaper, there’s no funeral director, and you just all stand around and celebrate that person’s life"

Planning your funeral or celebration with someone who cares can be a positive experience. It can help you to let them know about the kind of funeral you would like. It could include planning a service with music, poetry or anything else that would celebrate your life. It can be really positive for those around you as it allows them to feel that they are part of something special that you had put together.

There are many different kinds of burials, and even if there is no one in a position to be able to pay for a funeral, the Local Authority where you live will allow you to make a choice about the kind of funeral you would like, whether it is a cremation or a burial, and to have a service which anyone can attend.
Passing my possessions on to other people

"Why would I want to write a will?
I haven't got any money"

Even if you don’t feel you have much, there may be things you’d like a friend or family member to have after you have died. There may also be people that you would prefer not to leave anything to.

There might be something you wish to give to someone personally before you die. You may wish to write a will or even a note listing the people and things you are leaving to them. If you would like to write a will then it is important to discuss it with someone who understands the legal implications, and that it is signed by you and a witness.
What to do next

There is no pressure to do anything else or talk about it, but if you did want to think more about these things or talk to someone, you might find the following list helpful. You might want to use it to write down your wishes, and talk them through with someone who cares about you.

My name

Where I would like to be cared for

Refusing treatment

Appointing power of attorney

5 things to do before I die

Reconnecting with people

My funeral wishes

Passing on my possessions to others

Other things that are important to me

Dying Matters have produced other leaflets that can help you to think about how you want to be cared for and what you want to do before you die. www.dyingmatters.org or call freephone 08000 21 44 66.

You might also like to use the Blue Wallet Scheme, which is being developed by the End of Life Care Programme, to record your wishes and keep them with you in case of an emergency. www.endoflifecareforadults.nhs.uk
Further information

Dying Matters is an inclusive, national coalition with thousands of members from across all sectors. Dying Matters is generating, leading and supporting collective action to promote public awareness and debate on issues of dying, death and bereavement in England. To find out more, join, or access more copies of this document visit: www.dyingmatters.org or call freephone 08000 21 44 66.

Talking about end of life choices with people who are homeless is a guide to support staff in having conversations with clients about their end of life wishes.

The National Council for Palliative Care is the umbrella charity for all those involved in palliative, end of life and hospice care in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. We work with government, health and social care staff and with people with personal experience to improve end of life care for all. www.ncpc.org.uk

Homelessness charity St Mungo’s provides accommodation for more than 1,600 people every night in emergency shelters, hostels and supported housing, mainly in London and the south of England. www.mungos.org

Marie Curie Cancer Care provides end of life care to terminally ill patients in their own homes, or in one of its nine hospices. www.mariecurie.org.uk

Homeless Link is the only national charity supporting people and organisations working directly with homeless people in England. www.homeless.org.uk

This document aims to help people who are homeless express their end of life wishes. It is based on conversations with service users and staff at Framework Housing, Nottingham and Luther Street Clinic, Oxford. Quotes included in the document are from those who took part in conversations. It was co-written by Peter Kennedy, Palliative Care Co-ordinator, St Mungo’s and Jo Black, Involvement Manager, NCPC.

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