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Cancer: End-of-Life Issues for the Caregiver

Not everyone who has cancer dies from it. In fact, there are nearly 9 million cancer survivors living in the United States today. However, if your loved one's cancer cannot be cured or controlled with treatment, then planning for how you and your loved one will handle the last stages of the disease can ease the burden for both of you. Ideally, you should make these decisions together, while your loved one is well enough to participate. Doing so can help give your loved one a sense of control and relieve you from having to make difficult decisions on your own at a time when you need to grieve.

What kinds of things should we plan for?

Palliative care: The goals of palliative care include relieving pain, improving emotional, spiritual and mental well being, and support for family members. A number of people can be involved in providing care, including members of the health care team, family, friends, a counselor or spiritual advisor. Palliative care can take place in a hospice setting. See our handout on [Palliative Care](#).

Hospice care: Talk with your loved one about hospice care and advanced directives. Hospice care focuses on providing people whose illness can't be cured or controlled with treatment with the most dignified, pain-free existence possible in their last stage of life. Advance directives are instructions on what kind of care your loved one wishes to receive when he or she becomes unable to make medical decisions.

Financial and legal issues: You and your loved one may wish to have an accountant or lawyer help you sort through financial and legal issues. You can review items such as your loved one's insurance policies, finances and his or her will. Make a list of people who should be contacted upon the death of your loved one, such as friends and family, employer, financial advisor and members of his or her place of worship. You may also want to make a list of where to find items like important documents, computer or cell phone details, car keys, credit cards and passport.

Funeral arrangements: Perhaps the most difficult part of this process is planning your loved one's funeral. Talk with your loved one about his or her preferences (for example, burial or cremation) in relation to your budget. Ask your loved one how he or she wants the service to be conducted. For example, you may want to discuss hymns or readings to include in the ceremony and people your loved one would like to have as pallbearers. Don't feel that any detail is too small to discuss. When selecting a funeral provider, be sure to compare prices, services and payment options. It will be easier to do this sooner rather than later.

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Other Organizations

- [American Cancer Society](http://www.cancer.org)
<http://www.cancer.org>
- [Funerals: A Consumer Guide, from the Federal Trade Commission](http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/services/funeral.htm)
<http://www.ftc.gov/bcp/online/pubs/services/funeral.htm>
- [National Family Caregivers Association](#)

- <http://www.nfcacares.org>
- [Well Spouse Association](http://www.wellspouse.org)
<http://www.wellspouse.org>
- [National Coalition for Cancer Survivorship](http://www.canceradvocacy.org/toolbox/module-12-dying-well-the-final-stage-of-survivorship/)
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