



May 4th, 2016

One of the biggest conversations you'll ever have

Health staff are asking people in Sunderland to have one of the most important conversations of their lives - about dying.

What better way to set the conversational ball rolling than by showing the film 'The Bucket List', about two terminally ill men who escape from a cancer ward and head off on a road trip with a wish list of 'to-dos' before they die?

St Benedict's Hospice and Centre for Specialist Palliative Care, in Ryhope, Sunderland, which is run by South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust, is hosting a screening of the box office hit, starring Jack Nicholson and Morgan Freeman, in Dying Matters Awareness Week for volunteers from the hospice, from City Hospitals Sunderland NHS Foundation Trust's Macmillan Cancer Support Centre and from South Tyneside District Hospital.

The theme of the week, beginning on May 9th, is 'The Big Conversation - Talking about dying won't make it happen!' and South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust's palliative care modernisation facilitators, Julie Newby and Louise Watson, want to encourage discussion about what is still, for many, a taboo subject. They hope the week will be a springboard for local people to have The Big Conversation all year round.

Mrs Watson said: "Health volunteers are ideally placed to encourage people to begin these conversations and we thought showing 'The Bucket List' was an interesting and enjoyable way to get them talking about how they can do this."

South Tyneside and City Hospitals Sunderland Trusts, NHS Sunderland Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and other local organisations are working in partnership to highlight Dying Matters Awareness Week across Sunderland through displays and information in hospital, the hospice and GP practices.

The St Benedict's day services team and in-patient unit staff are also supporting patients in thinking about what is on their own bucket list and in compiling journals chronicling their lives.

Mrs Watson added: "Every minute, someone in the UK dies but many of us still do not feel comfortable talking about dying. You may have strong views about your care and what happens after you die but if you don't talk about your wishes they are unlikely to be met. Only 18% of British adults say they have asked a family member about their end-of-life wishes. Not talking openly about death and dying affects our ability to die where or how we would wish. By talking through your thoughts, feelings and wishes with someone close to you, you can plan for a good death and also make your end-of-life experience the best it can be for your loved ones."



Mrs Newby said: "Of those people who die in hospital, only four per cent have made an advance care plan setting out what they want for the end of life. None of us likes to think about dying but not talking about it won't make it go away or make it happen sooner and having the conversation about it can help people to live well and to make the most of life until the very end."

NHS Sunderland CCG Clinical Chair and local GP Dr Ian Pattison said: "As a GP, I completely understand how difficult it can be for some people to talk about death but, equally, I know the relief that comes from having that conversation.

"None of us knows what will happen in the future. We all hope for a happy end but it could be the case that we become unable to let our family and friends know how we would wish them to deal with that situation when it approaches, however long or short a time that might be.

"You may have specific wishes about how you go out of this world and how your loved ones mark that sad event but do they know what these wishes are? Equally, do they know how you want to spend your final days or what they should do if they have to make these decisions for you?

"If you sit down with your loved ones and tell them what your end-of-life wishes are, you will be doing them, and yourself, a huge favour. They won't have to worry about how to handle your death, concerned that they may do things you wouldn't have wanted, and you will know that you have lifted this burden from them. Don't leave it until it's too late."

Simple steps people can take to make their end-of-life experience better include:

- Write your will to avoid leaving difficult legal problems for your family
- Make financial plans to ensure the people you care about are protected
- Record your funeral wishes so your family know what you would want
- Plan your future care and support e.g. by setting up a Lasting Power of Attorney; writing an advance care plan
- Register your decision about whether you want to be considered as an organ or tissue donor and share that decision with your loved ones

The national Dying Matters coalition's mission is to get people to talk openly about dying, death and bereavement and to raise awareness about end-of-life issues. For more information go to www.dyingmatters.org

Pictured above: St Benedict's Hospice and Centre for Specialist Palliative Care staff, left to right, Palliative Care Modernisation Facilitators Louise Watson and Julie Newby, Education and Development Lead Gail White, Lecturer Practitioner Julie Lamb and Practice Development Project Nurse Sarah Dodds

Issued on behalf of South Tyneside NHS Foundation Trust by Kay Jordan

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