

Dying with Dignity

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Everybody dies, but not always with dignity. All too often, members of our community live out their last days of life confused by medical issues, stunned by health care expenses, in physical and/or emotional pain, and alone.

According to research conducted by LifeCircle South Dakota, an interdisciplinary organization home-based at the Sanford School of Medicine of The University of South Dakota, the five critical elements in the practice of end-of-life care are pain management, non-pain symptom management, spiritual issues, advance directives and family support.

As physicians, our patients and their family members often look to us for answers and guidance to help them through the final stages of life. I think this is especially true in our more rural areas where physicians are often viewed as leaders in their community and where multi-disciplinary teams,

designed to help those reaching end of life, are not as readily available.

To assist you in caring for patients who are reaching or already receiving end-of-life care, I encourage you to read this special issue of *South Dakota Medicine*. Within this issue, you will find articles on hospice and palliative care, advance directives, pain management, end-of-life ethical and legal issues, and bereavement.

Thank you, and congratulations to the SDSMA staff, the South Dakota Department of Health and the contributing physicians who have worked so hard to create this special issue of *South Dakota Medicine*.

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