



A **NEW PARADIGM** Evolving for End-of-Life **CARE**

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*It ought to be lovely to be old
to be full of the peace that
comes of experience
and wrinkled ripe fulfilment...
...Fragrant like yellowing leaves,
and dim with the soft stillness and
satisfaction of autumn...*

*"Beautiful Old Age,"
by D.H. Lawrence*

D.H. Lawrence was ahead of his time when he celebrated aging with these words. Following his call for a new perspective on aging and the end of life, many in the hospice and palliative care communities, as well as in the deathcare industry, are searching for better ways to end our days.

A new cultural paradigm is arising, ripe with personal meaning, conscious choices, and transcendent rituals that hope to bring us to our final days with ease and a sense of beauty and completeness. Many seniors are finding they want more control over their final days. They want a more natural and joyful ending that brings closure without all the medical intervention, hospitalization, and emergency room visits, and even something more than the cold and often impersonal funeral and burial traditions that have persisted for decades. They want creative options. Families, too, are looking for ways to add meaning and to personal-

ize funeral celebrations—everything from video legacies and balloon and lantern releases to home funerals and green burials.

Many have found the services of an end-of-life midwife, or death doula, offer just the kind of coaching and family support that is needed as the end-of-life process evolves. Hospice has built a strong support system for dying ones and their families, providing comfort medications, and adding spiritual and volunteer involvements that help to calm and ground families in the process. Still, many are finding there are ways that hospice cannot fulfill the ongoing

guidance that is needed day by day and hour by hour as families meet the end of life, often with fear and shock. End-of-life coaches can ease final months of life with consistent, compassionate care, establishing a relationship that evolves with the family going through the process.

Death doulas are an innovative and evolving field in deathcare. One pioneer in the industry is Henry Fersko-Weiss, former hospice social worker in New York City, who found that hospice provided some, but not all of what families need at end of life. In 2003, he proposed using the birth coach/birth doula model of care for end of life, and called the role a death doula. His organization, INELDA (International End of Life Doula Association), trains and certifies death doulas around the world. His goal is to "help the dying to find meaning in their life, express that meaning in powerful and beautiful legacies, and plan for the final days." Death doulas guide and support people through the dying process.

To find out more about the new paradigm in end-of-life services, including death doulas, home funerals, green burials, and death cafes in Madison, please visit inelda.org, The Great Circle Collaborative on Facebook, seasonsoflifemadison.com, naturalpathsanctuary.org, and walkingeachotherhomemadison.org.

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