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BIOETHICS  
UPdate

BIOETHICS UPdate xxx (2016) xxx–xxx

[www.elsevier.es/bioethicsupdate](http://www.elsevier.es/bioethicsupdate)

Original article

# A proposal for a shared care plan at the end of life: The Natural Death Protocol

*Una propuesta para un plan de cuidado compartido al final de la vida: el Protocolo de muerte natural*

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Received 9 January 2017; accepted 1 February 2017

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## Abstract

Over the last two-decade, major efforts have been underway to improve the standard of care at the end of life. Nevertheless, recent evidence has highlighted that many patients still receive overtreatment or inappropriate support to face dying in all its complexity. These scenarios may increase thoughts of death that often occur during the course of terminal illnesses requiring prompt and adequate interpretations and interventions. This suggests the need for a change in treating dying patients along with a clear understanding of the root causes of requests for euthanasia. In this regards, we propose a protocol for a shared end-of-life care plan aimed at ensuring a quality accompaniment toward natural death. It involves the patient and their family, as well as healthcare providers in a flexible work plan articulated in two phases concerning respectively pre-mortem and post-mortem actions. It offers a clear and systemic template for

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bioet.2017.02.001>

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Please cite this article in press as: Tambone, V., & Campanozzi, L.L. A proposal for a shared care plan at the end of life: The Natural Death Protocol. *BIOETHICS UPdate* (2016), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.bioet.2017.02.001>

care in preparation for natural death, which takes into consideration healthcare duties and the patient as a person.

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*Keywords:* Death; Dying; Euthanasia; Terminal palliative sedation; Advanced care planning; Natural Death Protocol

## Resumen

Desde hace dos décadas, se han realizado muchos esfuerzos para promover el cuidado estandarizado al final de la vida. No obstante, existen evidencias recientes que señalan que muchos pacientes todavía reciben tratamiento inapropiado para enfrentar el proceso de morir en toda su complejidad. Esos escenarios aumentan los pensamientos sobre la muerte en el proceso de la enfermedad terminal lo cual requiere prontas y adecuadas interpretaciones y acciones. Ésto sugiere la necesidad de cambiar el manejo de los pacientes en proceso de muerte comprendiendo claramente las raíces del porqué solicitan eutanasia. En éste sentido, nosotros proponemos un protocolo de cuidados de fin de vida en forma compartida que asegure la calidad de acompañamiento frente a la muerte natural. Este modelo implica al paciente y la familia, así como a los proveedores de salud en un plan flexible de trabajo articulado en dos fases de acciones, la pre-mortem y la post-mortem. Este modelo ofrece una clara y sistémica base de cuidado en preparación para la muerte natural, que toma en consideración las obligaciones del personal de salud y al paciente como persona.

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*Palabras clave:* Muerte; Morir; Eutanasia; Sedación paliativa terminal; Plan de cuidados avanzados; Protocolo de Muerte Natural

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## Introduction

“Death comes in any case, but its arrival is encrusted with untold woe. When death is the inevitable result of a chronic and incurable disease, it is often kinder not to impede it with heroic measures but to manage its approach with common sense and compassion” (Lown, 1999, p. 269). These suggestive words used by Lown in his famous book *The Lost Art of Healing* are an appropriate prolog to this study, because they touch on three important issues: the inevitability of death; death as a source of much apprehension and suffering; the need for an appropriate plan to

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