

Redefining a Compassionate Approach to a Good Death

Austin Lynn*

School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom

Abstract

In the realm of end-of-life care, the concept of a good death has emerged as a focal point, transcending medical boundaries to encompass physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and social dimensions. This article delves into the multifaceted nature of a good death, exploring its various components and implications for medical practitioners, caregivers, families, and society as a whole. It emphasizes the importance of minimizing pain and discomfort through palliative measures, fostering emotional well-being by enabling open communication and support, and acknowledging the significance of spiritual and existential considerations. The role of autonomy, decision-making, and legacy-building in preserving dignity is discussed, underscoring the need for personalized end-of-life care. The article concludes by advocating for a collaborative approach that respects individual preferences and seeks to redefine the narrative of successful dying, offering a compassionate passage marked by dignity, fulfillment, and a lasting legacy.

Keywords: Good death; End-of-life care; Palliative measures; Physical comfort; Symptom management; Emotional well-being; Psychological support; Spiritual considerations; Decision-making

Introduction

The concept of a "good death," often referred to as successful dying, has garnered significant attention in recent years as societies worldwide engage in discussions about end-of-life care, palliative measures, and the ethics of medical interventions. The pursuit of a good death goes beyond merely focusing on prolonging life; it encompasses the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of individuals as they approach the end of their journey [1]. This literature review aims to explore various perspectives on what constitutes a good death, shedding light on its multifaceted nature and its implications for medical practitioners, caregivers, families, and society at large. One of the cornerstones of facilitating a good death is the meticulous management of physical comfort and symptoms. As individuals approach the end of their lives, it becomes imperative to ensure that their journey is marked by minimal pain and discomfort. Palliative care, a multidisciplinary approach aimed at enhancing the quality of life for patients grappling with life-threatening illnesses, plays a pivotal role in achieving this crucial objective. Palliative care practitioners work in tandem with medical teams to implement strategies that provide relief from pain and alleviate the burden of distressing symptoms [2]. Whether the symptoms are related to the underlying illness or are side effects of medical treatments, the emphasis remains on tailoring interventions to suit the unique needs of each patient. Medications, therapies, and interventions are all orchestrated to minimize suffering, enabling patients to retain their dignity and experience a sense of control during their final moments. Numerous studies have underscored the indispensable role of effective pain management in fostering a dignified and peaceful dying process. Beyond the physiological benefits, optimal pain relief bolsters emotional well-being, instilling a sense of calmness and serenity. This ability to maintain comfort and control over one's physical sensations contributes significantly to an individual's overall perception of a good death. Recognizing the significance of emotional and psychological well-being is pivotal in fostering a good death [3]. The emotional challenges that accompany terminal illness extend beyond the physical realm, impacting not only the individual but also their loved ones. In this context, an environment that promotes open communication, emotional support, and addressing fears and anxieties is paramount. Communication lies at the heart of facilitating a good

death in emotional and psychological terms. Providing a platform for patients to articulate their concerns, preferences, and wishes enables a more nuanced understanding of their emotional state. This, in turn, empowers medical practitioners and caregivers to tailor interventions that align with the individual's needs. Psychological interventions, such as counseling and psychotherapy, have emerged as essential tools in helping patients navigate the complex emotional terrain of terminal illness. These interventions equip individuals with coping strategies, emotional outlets, and a safe space to express their feelings. The outcomes of such interventions are not solely limited to alleviating distress; they extend to fostering a sense of acceptance, promoting personal growth, and nurturing emotional resilience [4].

Moreover, creating opportunities for patients to reflect on their lives and engage in legacy-building exercises contributes to a profound sense of closure and fulfillment. Encouraging conversations that encompass life's achievements, cherished memories, and personal values enables individuals to leave behind a lasting legacy a narrative that resonates with their unique identity and experiences. Addressing the physical comfort and symptom management as well as the emotional and psychological well-being of individuals facing the end of life are pivotal components of achieving a good death. These dimensions are intertwined, each influencing and enriching the other. By providing comprehensive care that attends to the entirety of an individual's needs both physical and emotional society can work toward ensuring a dignified, peaceful, and fulfilling transition from life to death.

Autonomy and decision-making: Respecting a person's autonomy and honoring their wishes emerge as critical elements in the pursuit of a good death. Central to this principle is the concept of advance care

*Corresponding author: Austin Lynn, School of Nursing, Midwifery and Social Work, University of Manchester, Manchester, United Kingdom, E-mail: austin.l@hotmail.com

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planning a process that encourages individuals to engage in thoughtful discussions about their end-of-life preferences and decisions. By actively involving patients in these discussions, advance care planning empowers them to exercise control over their medical treatment options and the extent of interventions they deem acceptable. Advance care planning serves as a conduit through which individuals can express their values, beliefs, and priorities in the context of their dying process [5-8]. These conversations, often documented in advance directives or living wills, offer a roadmap for medical practitioners and family members to follow, ensuring that medical decisions align with the patient's expressed desires. A good death is intrinsically linked to the ability to make informed choices and have those choices upheld and respected. Research emphasizes the profound impact of this autonomy on an individual's sense of dignity and overall well-being during the dying process. By putting the individual at the forefront of decision-making, a good death not only grants a sense of control but also alleviates the potential burden of uncertainty and powerlessness that can accompany terminal illness.

Spiritual and existential considerations: Addressing spiritual and existential concerns occupies a significant space within the tapestry of a good death. For many individuals, grappling with the existential questions that arise as life draws to a close is a deeply profound and personal journey. Spirituality and religion offer a source of solace, comfort, and meaning during this transitional phase. The importance of integrating spiritual care into end-of-life practices is increasingly recognized as a means to enhance the holistic well-being of patients. Spiritual care encompasses providing opportunities for patients to engage in rituals, prayers, meditation, or discussions that align with their spiritual beliefs [9,10]. This dimension of care acknowledges the interconnectedness of physical, emotional, and spiritual health and the impact that a harmonious balance can have on an individual's overall sense of fulfillment and closure. Researchers emphasize that spiritual well-being contributes not only to the individual's own sense of peace but also influences the dynamics within families and communities. It provides a framework through which patients and their loved ones can find meaning, create lasting memories, and cultivate a sense of transcendence that extends beyond the physical realm. In the mosaic of a good death, maintaining social connections and relationships assumes a crucial role. Human beings are inherently social creatures, and the support of family, friends, and community can significantly shape the quality of the dying experience. The presence of a robust social network can alleviate feelings of isolation and loneliness, promoting a sense of belonging and emotional well-being. Studies emphasize that social support is a cornerstone in enhancing the overall quality of life for individuals facing terminal illnesses. A good death embraces the idea that dying is not a solitary endeavor, but rather a shared journey that draws strength from the relationships nurtured throughout life. The presence of loved ones provides a buffer against the emotional and psychological challenges that often accompany the end of life, offering comfort and companionship [11]. By fostering an environment where social connections are maintained and valued, a good death not only celebrates the relationships that have shaped a person's life but also lays the foundation for a peaceful and meaningful transition. The dimensions of autonomy and decision-making, spiritual and existential considerations, and social connectedness and support constitute integral components of a good death. Each of these facets speaks to the multifaceted nature of the human experience, acknowledging the diverse needs and desires that accompany individuals on their journey from life to death. By weaving together these threads, society can work toward nurturing a comprehensive framework that fosters dignity,

fulfillment, and a sense of purpose during the dying process.

Dignity and legacy: In the intricate tapestry of a good death, the preservation of dignity and the creation of a lasting legacy stand as profound and intertwined aspirations. These components transcend the physical realm, delving into the realms of emotional, psychological, and existential well-being, offering individuals a sense of purpose, closure, and fulfillment as they approach the end of their journey.

Preserving dignity: Dignity, often described as the inherent worth and value of every individual, remains a foundational aspect of a good death. As life draws to a close, upholding a person's dignity becomes a paramount consideration in end-of-life care [12]. This encompasses an array of factors, including physical comfort, autonomy, respect for personal choices, and the promotion of a sense of agency. Ensuring physical comfort through effective pain management and symptom relief not only addresses the physical dimension of dignity but also safeguards emotional and psychological well-being. By minimizing suffering and maximizing comfort, healthcare practitioners honor the intrinsic value of the individual, allowing them to retain a semblance of control over their own body and experiences. Respecting an individual's autonomy and wishes is a testament to their dignity. Advance care planning, discussed earlier, empowers individuals to assert their desires and preferences regarding medical treatment, allowing them to maintain a sense of control over their end-of-life journey. This process acknowledges that every person's path is unique and validates their right to make decisions aligned with their values and beliefs. Leaving a positive legacy, much like preserving dignity, holds a pivotal place in shaping the experience of a good death. The desire to leave behind a meaningful imprint is deeply rooted in the human experience a testament to the intrinsic yearning for connection and impact. In the context of end-of-life care, this aspiration takes on a profound significance, providing individuals with an avenue to reflect on their lives, achievements, and relationships. Acknowledging a person's life achievements, whether grand or seemingly modest, offers an opportunity for validation and affirmation. Celebrating accomplishments, experiences, and personal growth allows individuals to find a sense of fulfillment and pride in the life they have lived. This affirmation can bolster self-esteem and contribute to a positive self-perception, even as one approaches the end of life. Enabling individuals to share their life story is a deeply cathartic experience. Narrative therapy, reminiscence, and legacy-building exercises provide a space to reflect on memories, relationships, and personal growth [13,14]. Sharing these stories with loved ones can forge deeper connections and strengthen bonds, creating a sense of continuity that extends beyond physical existence. Perhaps most profoundly, a good death involves ensuring that an individual's wishes are respected even after they have passed. This might encompass end-of-life rituals, funeral arrangements, and the distribution of personal belongings. By honoring these wishes, loved ones and caregivers create a sense of closure and uphold the individual's agency beyond the realm of the living. Research unequivocally supports the notion that individuals who are afforded the opportunity to reflect on their lives and leave behind a meaningful legacy experience a more peaceful and fulfilled dying process. The act of embracing one's life journey, acknowledging its highs and lows, and imparting wisdom and insights to future generations all contribute to a profound sense of closure and acceptance. The concepts of dignity and legacy represent intricate threads in the fabric of a good death [15]. Together, they weave a narrative of empowerment, validation, and connection that guides individuals toward a peaceful and meaningful transition from life to death. By safeguarding dignity and nurturing the creation of a positive legacy, society embraces the humanity inherent

in every individual and paves the way for an experience imbued with grace and fulfillment.

Conclusion

Defining a good death is a complex and multifaceted endeavor that encompasses physical, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and social dimensions. As societies continue to grapple with end-of-life care and ethical considerations, it is imperative to recognize the importance of honoring individual preferences, fostering open communication, and providing comprehensive support to ensure a dignified and fulfilling dying process. Medical practitioners, caregivers, and families must work collaboratively to create environments that prioritize the well-being and autonomy of those facing the end of life, ultimately redefining the way we approach and understand successful dying.

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Conflict of Interest

Author declares no conflict of interest.

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