

Follow My Mother's Advice: Conversations Change Lives

"Death is difficult for all of us. Conversations helped me and my family during my mother's final days."

Pat Bomba, M.D.

My mother was a devout Catholic. When Patient Self-Determination Act was passed, she spoke to me about doing her PA Durable Power of Attorney for Health Care. We began our Thanksgiving tradition of having candid discussions about what our wishes are for end-of-life care. We knew exactly how our loved ones want to be treated if they can't speak for themselves. It's yet another reason to give thanks.

My mother lived with us during the last 15 months of her life. She was forgetful and not able to safely live in her home. She still had the ability to make health care decisions and completed a MOLST form. Her goal was to still visit her children and grandchildren who lived outside Rochester; she also wanted to have a natural death and not die "hooked up to machines." Her MOLST form reflected orders for Do Not Resuscitate, Do Not Intubate, No tube feedings, Accept Limited Interventions and Hospitalization. She became ill during a visit to Pennsylvania and required hospitalization. She received treatment for a kidney infection including fluids and antibiotics by vein. She was also found to have extensive abdominal lymphoma, a type of cancer.

She returned to Rochester. Her goals for care shifted to focus on ensuring the best quality of life. She chose Hospice care and her MOLST form was changed to reflect Comfort Care. Her desire for food diminished as time progressed. The aroma of her favorite foods cooking brought comfort, even if she ate little. She thanked me for not forcing her. Five days before her death, she supervised the aide baking her favorite bread while I traveled to Albany to present the results of the MOLST Community Pilot to state EMS leaders. She died peacefully in our home five days later, after 3 months of hospice care. Death is difficult for all of us, even for an end-of-life expert. Conversations over the years at our Thanksgiving dinner table helped me and my family during my mother's final days.