



Death, Dying and Hollywood

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Objectives

- Review how television and movies depict death and dying.
- Evaluate what this depiction means to our patients.
- Discuss how to explain the reality of death and dying to our patients and families.

Wouldn't it be nice.....



Television and Movie "Reality"

- The Resuscitation Scene
- The Dying Patient
- The Death Scene

Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation

Baywatch Rescue



Study published in the NEJM in 1996 *CPR on Television*

- Success rate
 - Calculated the success rate of CPR on 3 TV shows (ER, Chicago Hope and Rescue 911)
 - Success on TV = 65%, success in real life = 2-30%
- Representation
 - 65% of the patients that received CPR were children or young adults, in real life elderly patients are the majority
 - Trauma was the cause of the cardiac arrest in 62% of the patients, in real life it is closer to 5-25%

Resuscitation on Grey's Anatomy- Meredith survives with no deficits



Heaven's Prisoners Rescue of a girl who has drowned



Other Problems

- The quality of the CPR being done is often poor
 - Some people learn CPR from TV
 - It doesn't show the traumatic nature of CPR
- There was limited information about survival to discharge
 - Short term outcomes were the focus of the shows
 - If the outcome was shown it was either complete recovery or death

The Miracle of CPR It even works in cartoons!



What does this mean to patients?

- People have unrealistic ideas of CPR/DNR
 - "I thought CPR could bring me back"
- Survey of patients over 62 yrs old
 - 92% received information about CPR from television
 - Patients also overestimated survival rates
 - Similar results have been found in other studies-survey of patients over 74 and patients with COPD

What can we do?

- Have the conversation
 - Start with "What do you understand about CPR or being DNR"
 - Explain the realities
 - CPR was originally meant to restart healthy hearts in the event of trauma or arrhythmia
 - After resuscitation (if effective) the patient will end up in the ICU and usually intubated
- You can still use media to help teach
 - A lot of educational videos exist about CPR
 - Use examples of more realistic portrayals
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Good DNR talk Wit-Women dying of Ovarian CA



The Dying Patient

The Bucket List- Two Stage IV Lung Cancer Patients



Tuesdays With Morrie- End Stage ALS patient



Discrepancies

- Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson look pretty darn good for end stage cancer patients
 - At the end of The Bucket List, 1 patient survives long term and 1 patient dies during brain surgery
- Jack Lemmon was also looking pretty good for less than a week prior to his death of ALS

The Real Morrie



Philadelphia- End Stage AIDS Patient



They can actually get it right!

- Tom Hanks actually looks a lot like he is dying
- There are a good number of independent films/documentaries about real patients that provide a more realistic view
 - *Indestructible*
- These are the movies that we can use to help with education
- A study done in college students showed that watching 10 hours of *Six Feet Under* was equal to a course in death education in changing attitudes about death

The Death Scene

Love Story- Jennifer dies of leukemia



ER- Man dies in the emergency room



Battlestar Galactica- Laura Roslin dies of breast cancer



What is missing from these scenes?

- Symptoms
 - Delirium
 - Dyspnea
 - Pain
 - Secretions
- Unresponsiveness
- Weakness
- Sick looking people!

Misperceptions

- The patient will be awake and able to interact until the end (from the Love Story scene)
- Morphine is what kills people (from the ER scene)
- The patient will be able to be active and participate in activities until the end (from the Battlestar scene)

What can we do?

- Similar to what I said for the CPR scenes--
--education!
- Most people don't really believe everything they see on TV or in the Movies
- Medical professionals can educate the families about what they are seeing
 - "The Blue Book"

Questions?
Ideas?
Examples?

References

- Can a television series change attitudes about death? a study of college students and six feet under: Schiappa E; Gregg PB; Hewes DE, *Death Studies*, 2004 Jun; 28(5): 459-74 (44 ref)
- Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation on Television: Diem, Susan J et al, *The New England Journal of Medicine*, 1996; 334: 1578-82
- Mastering Communication with Seriously Ill Patients: Back, Anthony; Arnold, Robert; Tulsky, James, 2009