

# Death, Dying and Hollywood

Kimberly Case, MD Medical Director Hospice and Palliative CareCenter 12-10-10

# 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
  - O Calculated the success rate of CPR on 3 TV shows (ER, Chicago Hope and Rescue 911)
  - OSuccess on TV = 65%, success in real life = 2-30%
- Representation
  - O65% of the patients that received CPR were children or young adults, in real life elderly patients are the majority
  - OTrauma 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
  - OSome people learn CPR from TV
    Olt doesn't show the traumatic nature of CPR
- There was limited information about survival to discharge
  - OShort term outcomes were the focus of the shows
  - Olf 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
   O"I thought CPR could bring me back"
- Survey of patients over 62 yrs old
   O92% received information about CPB from
  - O92% received information about CPR from television
  - OPatients also overestimated survival rates
  - OSimilar results have been found in other studies-survey of patients over 74 and patients with COPD

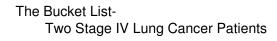
#### What can we do?

- Have the conversation
  - OStart with "What do you understand about CPR or being DNR"
  - O 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
  - OA lot of educational videos exist about CPR
  - OUse examples of more realistic portrayals

• ....



# The Dying Patient





### Tuesdays With Morrie-End Stage ALS patient



#### Discrepancies

- Morgan Freeman and Jack Nicholson look pretty darn good for end stage cancer patients
  - OAt 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
   OIndestructible
- 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



# ERMan dies in the emergency room



### Battlestar Galactica-Laura Roslin dies of breast cancer



#### What is missing from these scenes?

- Symptoms
  - ODelirium
  - ODyspnea
  - OPain
  - **OSecretions**
- 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
   O"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 III Patients: Back, Anthony; Arnold, Robert; Tulsky, James, 2009