



Celebrating 25 Years of the Jewish Healthcare Foundation

Changing Expectations for Care at the End of Life



The 2016 Fellowship on Death & Dying features nearly four-dozen graduate students and young professionals, from a variety of disciplines.

The healthcare system too often fails families and patients at end-of-life. Many Americans experience prolonged, painful deaths after receiving costly, invasive, and ineffective treatments. While end-of-life care involves emotional, physical, and financial burdens for patients and loved ones, important conversations about preparing for the inevitable have been rare.

To address these issues, in 2007 the Jewish Healthcare Foundation (JHF) launched a unique education, community-organizing, and planning initiative called *Closure*. The goal of *Closure* is to raise awareness and change expectations around end-of-life, and spark a social movement to honor patients' and loved ones' care goals. Since then, JHF's work has been multi-dimensional. Under the umbrella of *Closure*, it has prepared consumers, family caregivers, healthcare professionals, lawyers, clergy, and community advocates with accessible, clear information and resources to make educated decisions about end-of-life care.

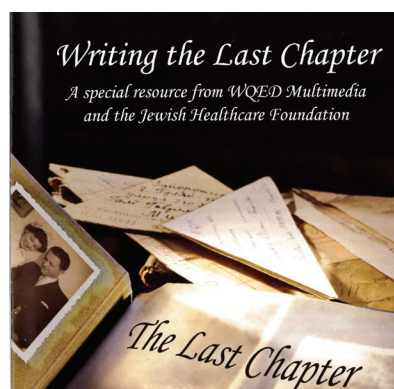
The Foundation's *Closure* team includes Tamara Sacks, MD, and Jonathan Weinkle, MD. JHF's first two *Closure* series were held within the Jewish community and the Foundation has conducted additional series in partnership with the Jewish Association on Aging, Congregation Beth Shalom and Temple Sinai. The *Closure* model is also featured as part of the Osher Series.

The Last Chapter

In 2011, as part of *Closure*, JHF supported a WQED documentary called "The Last Chapter" (which can be viewed online at: wqed.org/tv/thelastchapter). The one-hour special takes viewers inside the hospital, hospice, homes, and lives of palliative and hospice care recipients and providers. It explores medical, ethical, practical, and spiritual issues from several perspectives, and shows how patients seeking palliative and hospice care can take an active role in their own end-of-life planning, make decisions about their treatment, and communicate their needs to caregivers. While difficult, these conversations can help family members be responsive to one another's medical needs and preferences, and also enhance family connection and healing. A panel discussion called "Before the Last Chapter" also features a profile of the late Malka Bara and her family.

Closure 101

The *Closure* website (closure.org) offers short video

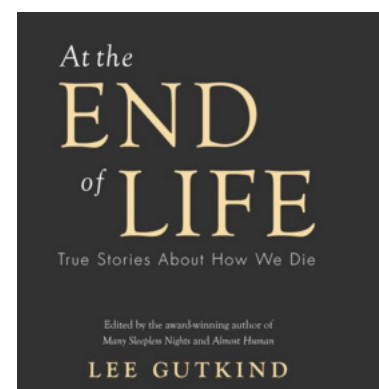


JHF's multi-pronged effort to raise expectations for end-of-life care includes a documentary and creative nonfiction.

modules, in a series called *Closure 101*, to help patients and families have important conversations with their healthcare providers about the trajectory of a life-limiting illness, and to help patients and families think together about advance planning, palliative care, caregiver stress, and more. The website also provides a library of resources — from Advance Healthcare Directives to consumer tool kits for healthcare advance planning to a hospice care questionnaire.

Fellowship on Death & Dying

The *Closure* initiative also aims to prepare healthcare providers to engage in conversations about their patients' wishes for end-of-life care. In addition to providing a number of resources for building *Closure* into medical practices, JHF also runs the Fellowship on Death & Dying for graduate students in interdisciplinary health-related fields. The fellowship takes on the key challenge that many professionals are not well prepared to deal with death, dying, and grieving families. In seven sessions, the fellows learn, confront, and discuss the legal, medical, social, cultural, familial, and spiritual aspects of death and dying in a low-pressure environment. The sessions also include site visits, facilitated conversations, opportunities to practice conversation skills, and the chance to create a collective community action plan.



Changing Policy

At the policy level, JHF helped to form and manages the Coalition for Quality at End of Life (CQEL), an organization dedicated to improving the quality of care to seriously ill people and their families in western Pennsylvania. CQEL furthers its mission in collaboration with key stakeholder groups, including health systems, providers, insurers, citizen groups, government agencies and an array of philanthropic, faith-based and other organizations. Together they work to build capacity among local healthcare institutions to deliver skilled and compassionate care. CQEL also focuses on lessening the regulatory and financial barriers to quality end-of-life care.

Sharing Stories

Finally, JHF commissioned award-winning author Lee Gutkind to curate and edit an anthology of 22 compelling personal stories that explore death, dying, and palliative care and evoke the very human, shared drama of our lives and deaths. The stories in *At the End of Life* include a poet and former hospice worker reflecting on death's mysteries; a son wandering the halls of his mother's nursing home; a grief counselor struggling with losing his own grandfather; and a medical intern tracing the origins and meaning of time. These original, compelling personal narratives reveal the inner workings of hospitals, homes, and hospices where patients, their doctors, and their loved ones all battle to hang on—and to let go.

For more information about JHF's end-of-life programs, please contact Nancy Zions, JHF's COO and Chief Program Officer, at zions@jhf.org.

Learn more about JHF's journey to better health and health care by ordering our 25th Anniversary *ROOTS* magazine (contact Carla Baccella at: baccella@jhf.org).