



# Emergency Department End-of-Life Care Toolkit

## CHECKLIST

- For a patient who has presented to the ED multiple times in the last year, perhaps with exacerbations of ongoing conditions, consider asking the Surprise Question: Would you be surprised if this patient dies within the next few months/weeks/days? Is it time to initiate a conversation about end-of-life care?
- Check if the patient has an existing Advance Care Plan. If they have not yet started a discussion about their end-of-life care, be proactive and [start the conversation](#).
- When talking to a family member about a patient who is at the end of life in the ED, ensure there is a common understanding of the patient's condition, focus on finding out what the patient would want based on their own beliefs and values, listen and hold space for family members, and frame discussions around goals rather than specific treatments.
- Remember, families and patients can feel a variety of emotions when end-of-life care is provided, or death happens in the ED. Be prepared for strong emotions. Anger and utter sadness are common, along with a genuine surprise that death has occurred, even when the death may have been expected.

## HELPFUL LINKS

- Australian College of Emergency Medicine (ACEM). 2025. [End of life and palliative care in the emergency department: P455 V3](#)
- Indigenous Program of Experience in the Palliative Approach (IPEPA). 2020. [IPEPA Cultural Considerations: Providing end-of-life care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#)
- Palliative Care Network of Wisconsin. 2019. [Palliative Care Consultation in the Emergency Department](#)
- State of New South Wales (Agency for Clinical Innovation). 2020. [Emergency Care Institute – Clinical Tools: End of life care](#)

## VIDEOS, BLOGS, PODCASTS

- CareSearch Blogs. 2018. [Palliative Perspectives: Family member experiences of the sudden unexpected death of a loved one in an emergency department setting – Dr Tracey Giles](#)
- Flinders RePaDD. 2025. [Bridging Paramedicine and Palliative/End-of-Life Care: A Collaborative Approach](#)
- This Emergency Life – A Podcast. 2021. [Episode 20 – End of Life Care in the ED with Jo Neil](#)

## FURTHER READING

- Becker C, Lecheler L, Hochstrasser S, Metzger KA, Widmer M, Thommen EB, Nienhaus K, Ewald H, Meier CA, Rueter F, Schaefer R, Bassetti S, Hunziker S. Association of Communication Interventions to Discuss Code Status With Patient Decisions for Do-Not-Resuscitate Orders: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis. *JAMA Netw Open*. 2019 Jun 5;2(6):e195033. [doi: 10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.5033](https://doi.org/10.1001/jamanetworkopen.2019.5033)
- Cruz-Carreras MT, Chaftari P, Viets-Upchurch J. Advance care planning: challenges at the emergency department of a cancer care center. *Support Care Cancer*. 2018 Feb;26(2):585-588. [doi: 10.1007/s00520-017-3870-x](https://doi.org/10.1007/s00520-017-3870-x)
- Heufel M, Kourouche S, Angela Lo WS, Thomas B, Hood L, Curtis K. End of life care pathways in the Emergency Department and their effects on patient and health service outcomes: An integrative review. *Int Emerg Nurs*. 2022 Mar;61:101153. [doi: 10.1016/j.ienj.2022.101153](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ienj.2022.101153)