Ending the discussion on the end of life

A Canadian team examined whether seriously ill patients remembered having discussed how long they had left to live with their doctor, or whether they were interested in having such a discussion. When possible, the patients’ friends and family were also asked the same question (1).

Terminaly ill patients. 440 patients and 160 family members identified by the patients were interviewed by Canadian hospital physicians. The patients were at least 55 years old, and half of them were seriously ill. The survey did not show how many of the patients who had not discussed their prognosis with their doctor, 44% said they would be interested in having such a discussion, while the remaining 56% of patients said they would not.

Some patients wanted to discuss their life expectancy, while others preferred to avoid the subject. At the time of the survey, in response to the question “Have the doctors told you how long you (or the patient) can expect to live?”, 74 (18%) of 412 patients wanted to discuss the end of life with their doctor were able to do so.

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