

If not you, who?

Advance Care Planning Day is April 16



Opening the door to conversation: Ann and Gordon

As we move through life and our relationships and needs change, conversations about advance care planning (ACP) are an opportunity to bring couples and families closer together by learning about our loved one's wishes in the event of a life-altering illness or accident.

Long-term partners Ann and Gordon* have recently started their will and estate planning and have started having conversations about health and personal care in the event of sudden decline in health or accident.

Ann slowly began to open the door by including ACP as a part of their dinner conversations every night.

Ann is a passionate advocate of advance care planning, and she stresses the importance of engaging our partners and families in

these conversations. Sharing wishes for future health care can go a long way to removing pressure from partners, family and friends in the event of a medical emergency.

Ann acknowledges however, that this is not an easy conversation to have. Gordon was very uncomfortable with the ACP conversations initially, most likely rooted in a fear of the unknown and lack of understanding about what advance care planning is. Ann slowly began to open the door by including ACP as a part of their dinner conversations every night, encouraging Gordon to begin thinking about his wishes and beliefs surrounding future and end-of-life care.

Ann's Tips:

You are never too young to have this conversation; advance care planning should be part of your life planning, just like estate, financial or retirement planning.

Conversations between life partners can help facilitate the conversations between families and our loved ones. We can bring our own experience with advanced care planning, which allows us to have these conversations from a place of education and awareness.

According to Ann, asking questions about advance care planning can be an incredibly powerful and valuable tool that allows us to learn about our families and loved one's values, beliefs and wishes when it comes to advance care planning.

One key question that Ann says really helped Gordon understand what advance care planning is, was "What does dead mean to you?". Through their discussions Ann and Gordon were able to explore what death and dying meant to each other and the impact of medical care and what quality of life looks like for them. Ann shared that

Gordon was very uncomfortable with the ACP conversations initially, most likely rooted in a fear of the unknown and lack of understanding about what advance care planning is.

Dr. Blair Bigham's book, *"Death Interrupted: How Modern Medicine Is Complicating the Way We Die,"* was a valuable resource in facilitating their conversations. The book explores death and dying and how modern medical interventions have created challenges and conflict between families and physicians when family members are unable to speak for themselves.

Ann adds that these conversations are also a way to strengthen the bonds between partners and families. "We get greater clarity about our intentions and remove pressure from our loved ones," she says. "Nobody really wants to talk about this she says, but we have to have the conversation, get beneath the layers and work with the unknown."

** Names have been changed for privacy*