TRENDS IN THE CONSCIOUS DYING MOVEMENT: REQUISITE LITERACIES FOR IMPROVING END-OF-LIFE CARE

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Connect. Collaborate. Catalyze.

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Objectives:

- Identify integrative trends emerging in the nursing and associated end-of-life literature
- Discuss Conscious Dying philosophy, the End-of-Life Doula movement, and the current use of entheogens in research and practice
- Apply content to current practice across settings where appropriate

**William Rosa, Stephanie Hope, & Tarron Estes have no actual or potential conflicts of interest in relation to this presentation.*

CONSCIOUS DYING

- Rooted in a Caring Science ontology
- Restore death to its sacred place in the beauty, mystery, & celebration of life
- Renew the purpose and art of caregiving as a spiritual practice
- Embrace an ethic of evolving human-centered care
- Promote healing and wholeness for all

Estes (2013); Rosa & Estes (2016); Rosa, Estes & Watson (2017)

WE ARE…

- Starting with the end in mind
- Whole, held, and healing
- Stewards of the great mystery
- Servants of death’s true purpose

Conscious Dying Institute (2018); Estes (2013)

CONSCIOUS DYING PRINCIPLES & PRACTICES

CONSCIOUS DYING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES: INDIVIDUAL & SYSTEMS REFLECTION

1. Increase beauty, pleasure, contentment.
2. Provide emotional and spiritual support.
3. Initiate conversations about the dying process.
4. Practice self-care to reduce burnout and emotional fatigue.
5. Demystify the stages of the dying process.

Estes (2013); Rosa (2014)

CONSCIOUS DYING PRINCIPLES AND PRACTICES: INDIVIDUAL & SYSTEMS REFLECTION

6. Acknowledge mysteries, miracles, and unexplained events.

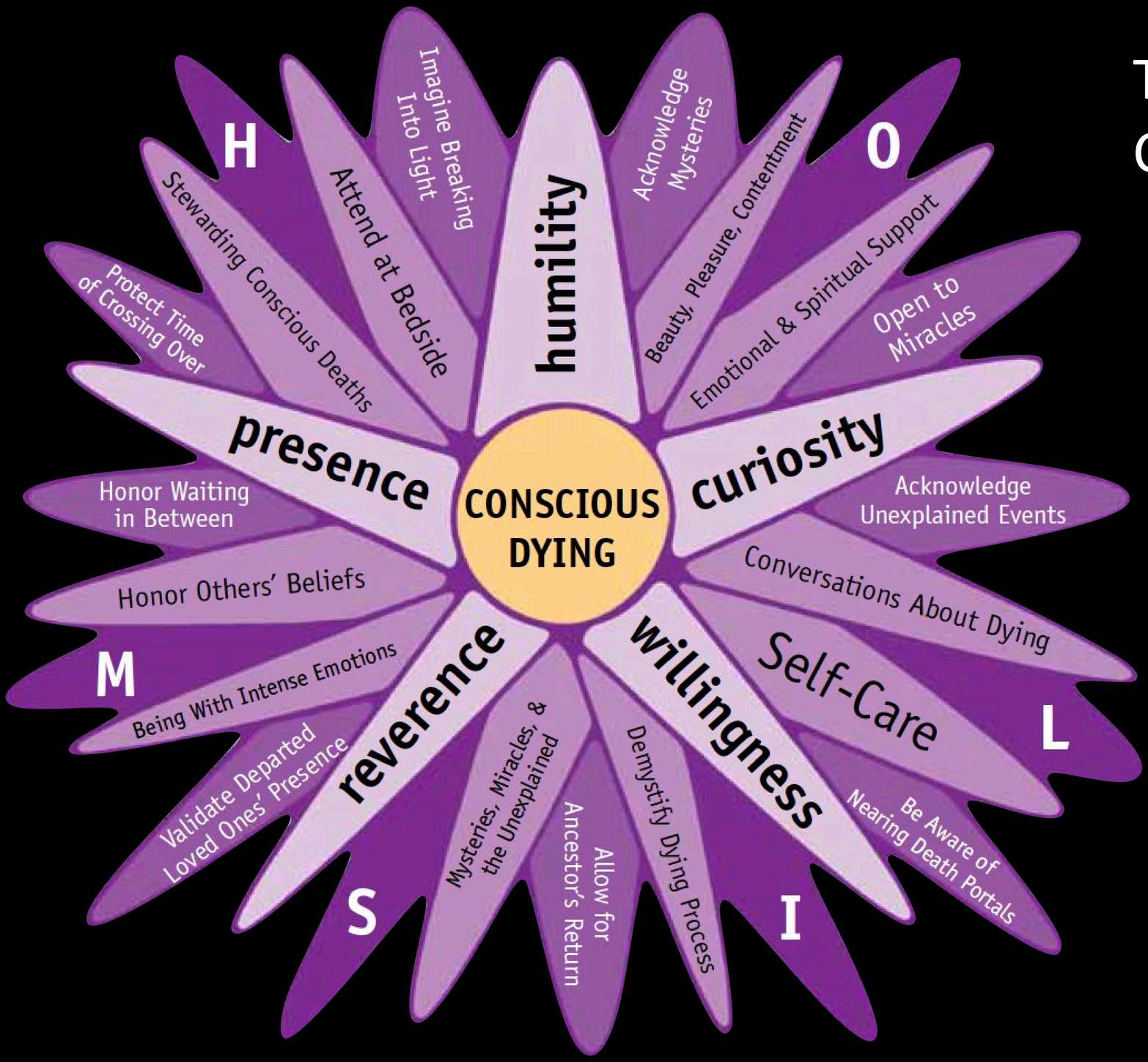
7. Learn how to be with intense emotions.

8. Honor others' beliefs without allowing them to threaten your own.

9. Be a steward of conscious deaths.

10. Attend at bedside. No one dies alone.

Estes (2013); Rosa (2014)



THE LOTUS OF CONSCIOUS DYING

- Conscious Dying emerges through:
  - Acts of presence, humility, curiosity, willingness and reverence
  - Attention to the Conscious Dying Principles & Practices
  - Embracing the Subtle Energy Realms
  - A holistic paradigm

Rosa & Hope (2017); Rosa, Estes, Hope & Watson (2019)

WHAT IS A 'DEATH DOULA'?

- Service to the dying person, family members, & communities
- Allowing to speak openly
- Exploring the meaning of life
- Preparing for last days through an intuitive presence
- Modeling, teaching, communicating, processing

INELDA, 2017

END-OF-LIFE DOULAS

- National Hospice and Palliative Organization: EOLD Advisory Council
- Share much in common with palliative specialists
- Integrating humanity into the realities of medicalized care
- Improving the quality of health services

Fukuzawa & Kondo, 2017; INELDA, 2017; NEOLDA, 2017; NHPCO, 2018; Rawlings et al., 2018

SUPPORTING SPIRITUAL QUALITIES

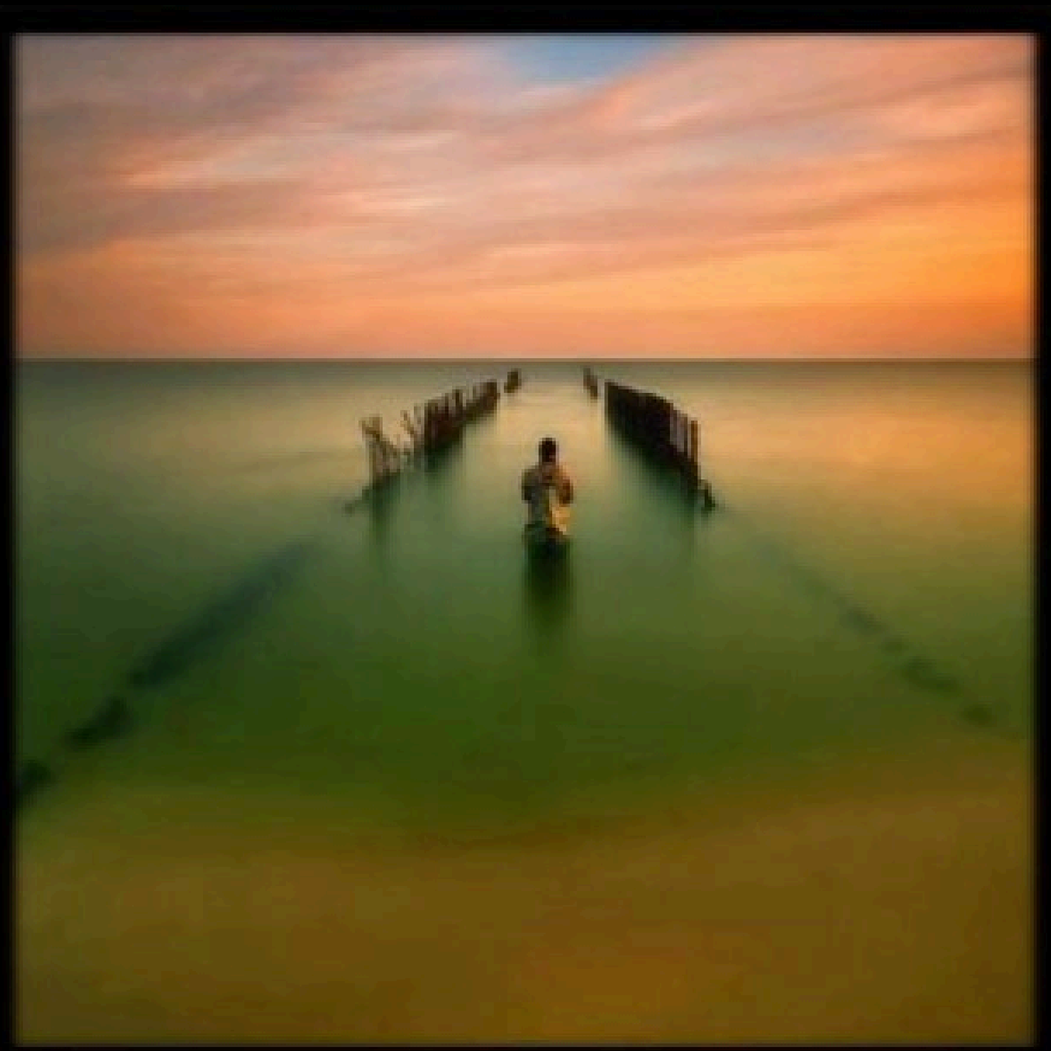
- Relaxation
- Interiority
- Brightness
- Radiance
- Silence
- Sacredness
- Transcendence
- Knowing
- Intensity
- Merging
- Presence
- Love

Conscious Dying Institute (2018)

ACKNOWLEDGE UNEXPLAINABLE EVENTS

VALIDATE THE PRESENCE OF DEPARTED LOVED ONES

PROTECT THE TIME OF CROSSING OVER



ENTHEOGENIC THERAPY FOR SPIRITUAL DISTRESS RELATED TO SERIOUS ILLNESS

- Entheogen: medicine that when ingested can engender an experience of the sacred (also known as psychedelics)
- Used for healing and growth in indigenous societies - psilocybin mushrooms, ayahuasca, peyote, iboga, salvia divinorum
- >100 trials of psilocybin and LSD in 1960s before research was banned
- Promising new research results treating anxiety and depression in people with cancer or other advanced serious illness

ETHEOGENS - RESEARCH

- Psilocybin or LSD administered in supportive setting
- 8 hour dosing session
- Two trained guides
- 3 preparation sessions before, 3 integration sessions after

P S I L O C Y B I N

Griffiths (2006) – healthy volunteers

- 67% of subjects rating the experience as either “the single most meaningful experience of his or her life or among the top five…similar, for example, to the birth of a first child or death of a parent”

Griffiths et al. (2016) at Johns Hopkins; Ross et al. (2016) at NYU – existential anxiety in cancer patients

- RCT, placebo controlled, crossover design, N=51 at Johns Hopkins, 29 at NYU
- Immediate, large reductions in symptoms of anxiety and depression
- Results sustained after six months - 60–80% of participants continued with clinically significant reductions in depression or anxiety
- Improvements in quality of life and attitudes toward death

Phase 3 trials upcoming which could lead to rescheduling for legal therapeutic use

LSD

Gasser et al., (2014) - anxiety associated with life-threatening illness

- Pilot, N=12
- RCT, placebo controlled, crossover design
- Decreases in state and trait anxiety scores approaching significance with large effect sizes
- Results maintained at 1 year

ENTHEOGENS RESEARCH - THEMES

- Single dose effect
- Meditated by mysticism – mystical experience increases likelihood of reductions in depression and anxiety
- Only transient, mild side effects reported in clinical trials
- Qualitative themes (Belser et al., 2017):
  - Exalted feelings of joy, bliss, and love
  - Embodiment
  - Ineffability
  - Alterations to identity
  - Movement from separateness to interconnectedness

PATIENT ACCOUNT

I had the opportunity to relax. I rather connected to my inner world…It was less about my illness. I was able to put it into perspective... Not to see oneself with one's sickness as center. There are more important things in life. ... The evolution of humankind for example. ... Your Inner Ego gets diminished, I believe, and you are looking at the whole ... you are indeed starting to build relations with plants or with the entire living world around. You think less about yourself, you are thinking – across borders.

~LSD serious illness study (Gasser, Kirchner, & Passie, 2015)

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“I return to God
I release my body to the earth
I retrieve my energy from all worldly things

I relax into the source of my being
Death is my teacher
I have prepared for this moment all of my life
All teachings converge for this departure
The truth of impermanence envelops me

I am free from suffering
I release my spirit to the light
I am forgiven
My work is done
I return to the light”

-TARRON ESTES, PRACTICE FOR DEATH