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TIME TO TALK DEATH AND DYING

The AMA is encouraging families to use the holiday season to have the important but difficult conversations about end of life care.

AMA President, Professor Brian Owler, said today that death and dying are not easy subjects to discuss, but it is important for people to talk to their doctor, family, and carers about how they would like to be treated in the event of a serious or fatal accident, or illness.

“No-one likes to talk about death or dying, but it is important that people have the conversation with their doctors and loved ones about how they would like to be treated when they approach the end of their life,” Professor Owler said.

“As if the distress of witnessing a loved one approaching the end of their life is not enough, relatives and carers are often left guessing about how a person wanted to be treated because they never made their wishes known.

“The AMA is calling on people to develop Advance Care Plans and discuss them with their relatives, carers, and doctors.”

Advance Care Plans set out how someone wants to be treated at the end of their life, and are a guide for families and health workers in the event that a patient cannot make or communicate their wishes.

Advance Care Plans can be formalised as an Advance Care Directive, which is a written document recognised in common law and authorised by legislation. But they may also be set out in a Medical Enduring Power of Attorney, a letter written to the person responsible for decision-making; an entry in a person’s medical record; or even a verbal instruction.

Professor Owler said Advance Care Planning is relevant to people of all ages and levels of decision-making capacity.

“Advance Care Plans are relevant to anyone at any age,” Professor Owler said.

“An Advance Care Plan gives an individual, their family, and carers the confidence that treatment is being provided in accordance with the patients beliefs and wishes.

“The AMA encouraged people to use the holiday season to talk to their family and doctors about Advance Care Planning.

“People should prepare an Advance Care Plan and ensure that their doctors and loved ones know about it, and have access to it – for everyone’s peace of mind.”

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