

Better (and Worse) Things to Say to Patients and Families in Palliative Care

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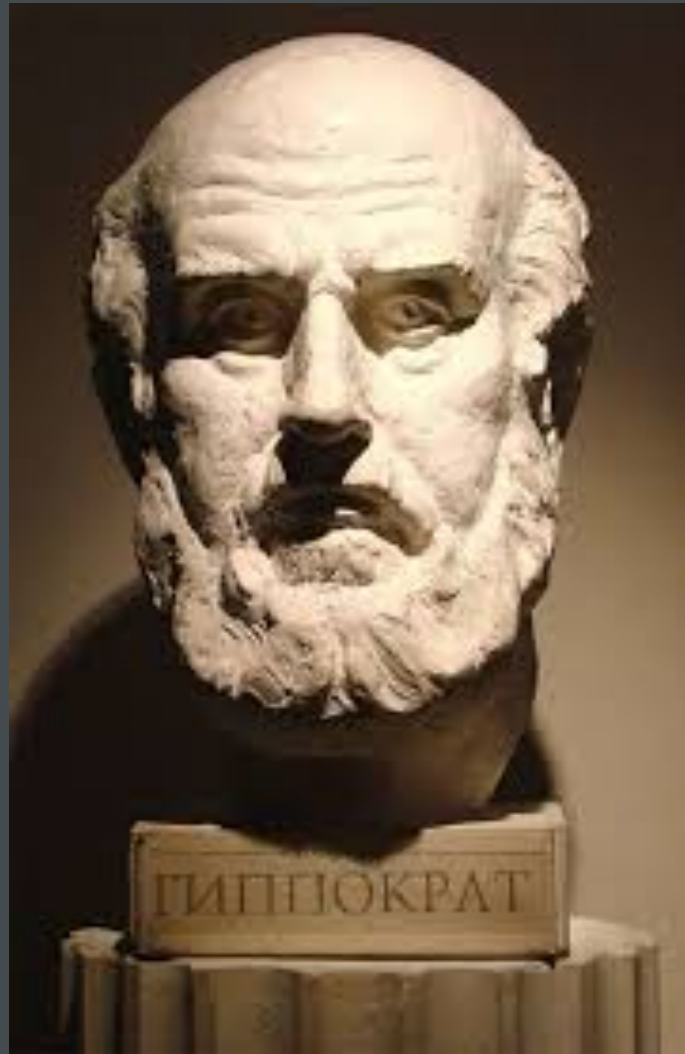
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On Prognosis



On Most Shifts

Patient or family does not understand prognosis 53%

Patient is unlikely to benefit from attempts at resuscitation 62%

Prognosis

Time

Function

Unpredictability

We would all live our lives differently if we knew we had only one year to live

Time

- Hours to days
- Day to weeks
- Weeks to months
- Months to a year

Worry

“I worry that time may be as short
as months to a year.”

Prognosis

Time

Function

Function

Best predictor of survival

“When you think about what lies ahead,
what worries you the most?”

Function

“I hope you can maintain as much independence as possible.

I’m also worried that you may get weaker over time and may not be able to live on your own as you get sicker.”

Prognosis

Time

Function

Unpredictability

“When you think about the future,
what do you hope for?”

“I wish I could say with certainty that
you will make it to the wedding,
but I worry that something could
happen suddenly”

Ask the specialist

Communicating Prognosis

- Communicate optimistic aspects of treatment while acknowledging pessimistic prognosis
- “The radiation should really help control the pain even if it can’t cure the cancer.”

Robinson et al. *Supp Care Cancer* 2008 16:1049-1057

“I don’t want to die”

“Everybody dies some day”

“Of course you don’t”

“I wish we had other treatments that would help treat the cancer”

Communicating Prognosis

- Be humble
- Be kind
- Be courageous
- Be on the patient's side
- Hope for the best for the patient

Prognosis

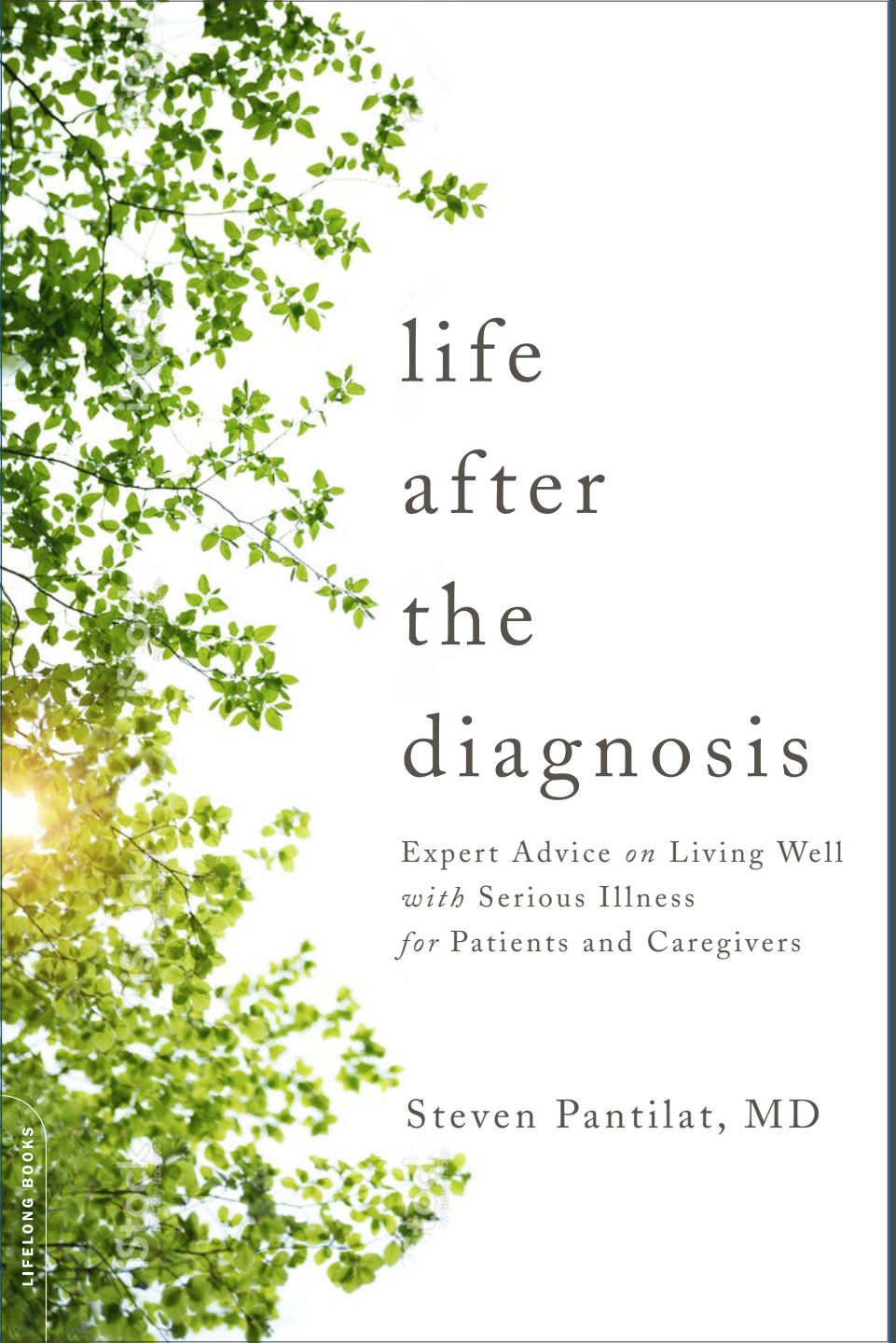
- A key role of the physician
- Time, function, unpredictability
- “I worry...”
- “I wish...”
- Be kind, be humble, be courageous

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