

Is it indispensable,
necessary, desirable that
we speak of death ?

Gwendoline Loosveld



1. Let's talk about **death in general**
2. Dealing with one's **own death**
3. Dealing with **death in front of a patient**
4. **Conclusion**

1. Let's talk about death in general



1. Let's talk about death in general



13th Century
Anonymous

A Brief Historical Detour

1. Let's talk about death in general



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1. Let's talk about death in general



- We have gained a great deal of expertise and developed hyper-powerful technologies to save and prolong lives.
- Death = a technical problem to be solved. Otherwise it's a failure
- The familiar discourse around death in our overdeveloped societies will therefore disappear.
- Death is apparently wrong to exist, and it is our duty not to think about it too much. Which gives us the impression of outsmarting her.



1. Let's talk about **death in general**
2. Dealing with one's **own death**

2. Dealing with one's own death



Is it possible
NOT to think
about death ?

G rard Apfeldorfer – Psychiatrist – Book : Dare die, Dare live

2. Dealing with one's own death

"Over-occupation is the most popular way of life in Western societies today.

We're constantly switching from one activity to another: studying, working, traveling, reading, running, playing, watching TV, surfing the Internet...

We avoid "dead time" so we don't have to think about death."

2. Dealing with one's own death

« To be comfortable with death, to see it as a time of life, taming it, ... release our energies and enable us to live life to the full.

The more we explore death, its ins and outs, the more we become familiar with the idea and the less we fear it. »

G. Apfeldorfer

2. Dealing with one's own death



By reflecting on **our death**, we avoid situations that are difficult to live through, on several levels : legal, administrative, relationnel, rituel, societal, medical ...

2. Dealing with one's own death

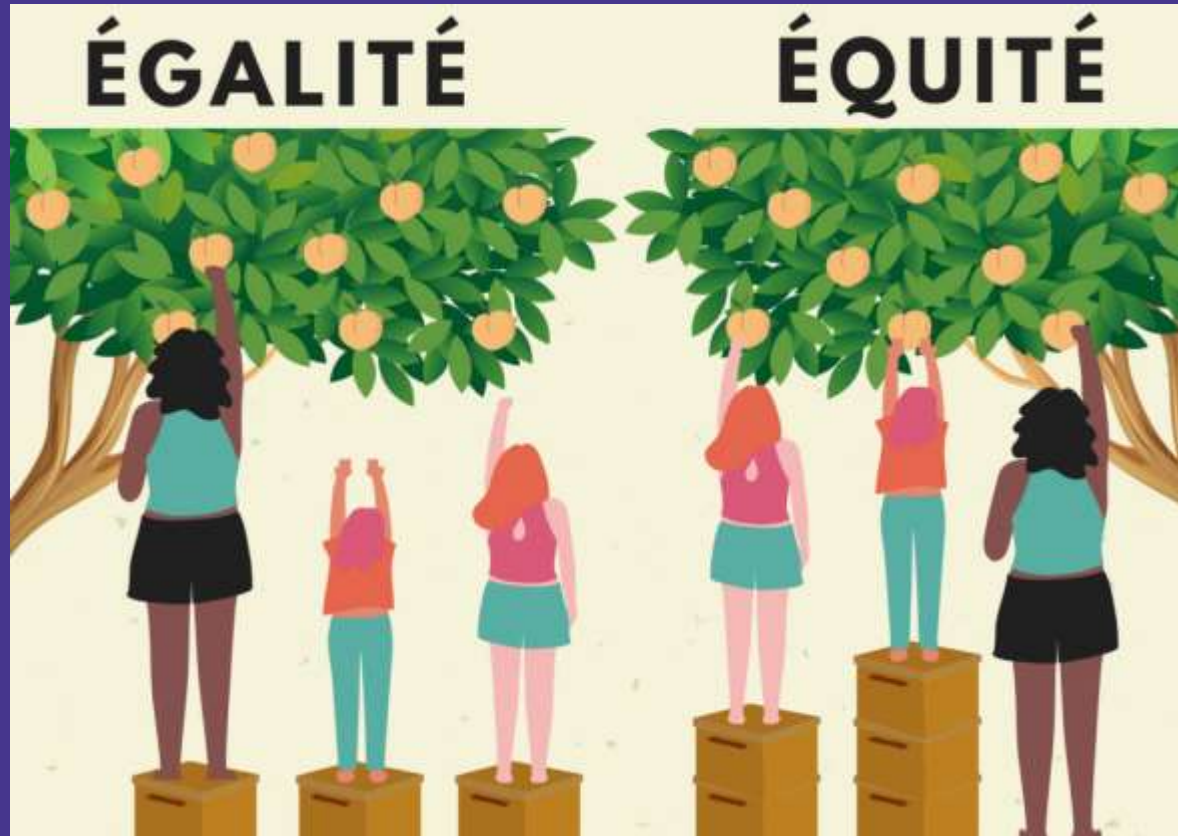


Have you prepared this bundle that gathers all your **assets and liabilities**.

Where can we find all information about your identity, your property deeds, your insurance, your car, your bank accounts, your debts, your digital succession, your internet accounts, your passwords, your photos, your e-mails ?

Mixing administration and emotions is difficult.

2. Dealing with one's own death



To avoid the all-too-frequent family conflicts surrounding the liquidation of the estate.

2. Dealing with one's own death



Funeral rites who have already been discussed and clarified long before **avoid manipulation** ... and it gives you time to take **care of the essentials**.

"Dying is the best time to sell"

2. Dealing with one's own death



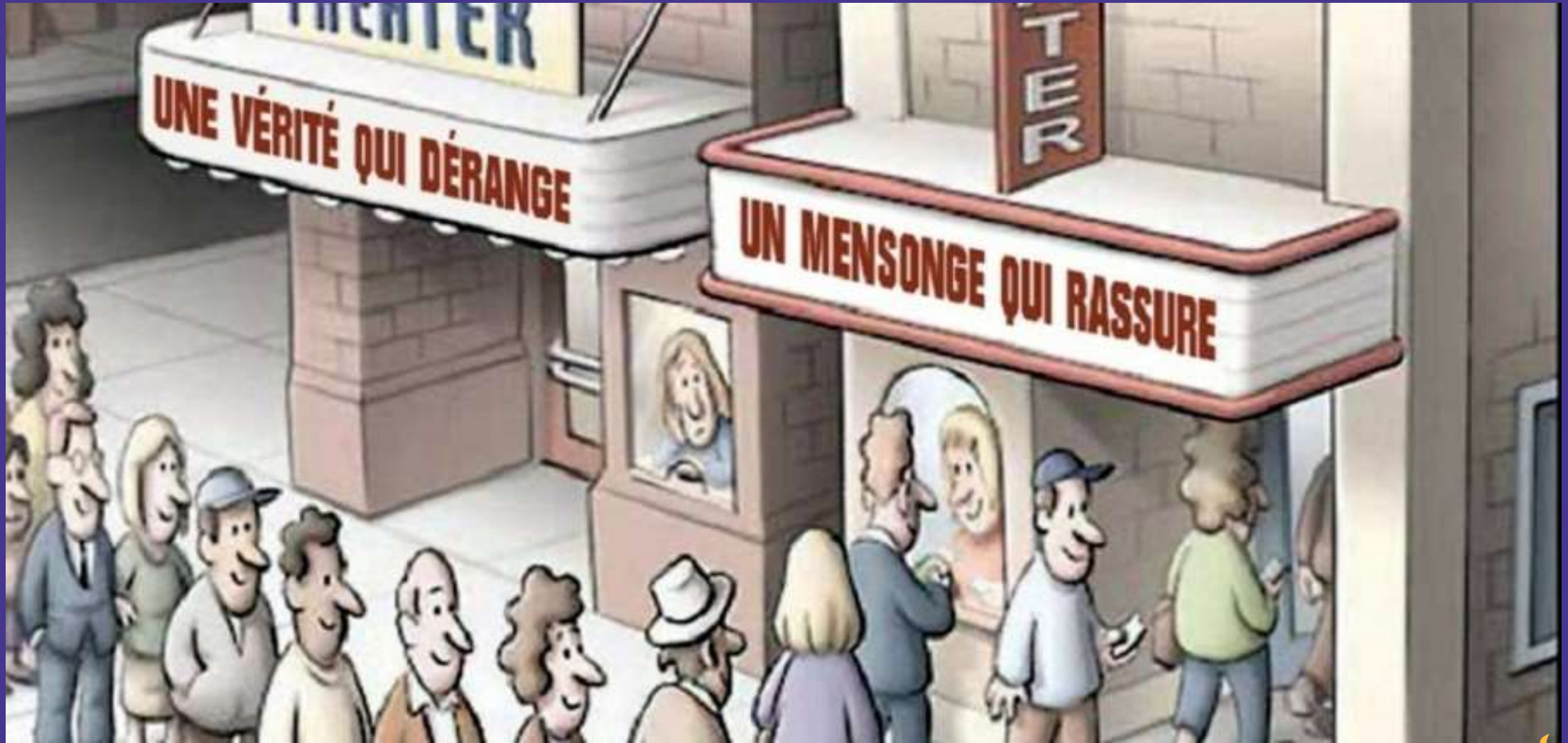
"If I'm afraid of my own death, I find it more difficult to accompany, to be truly empathetic."

Vincent Rébeillé-Borgella - médecin généraliste



1. Let's talk about **death in general**
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3. Dealing with death **in front of a patient**

3. Dealing with death in front of a patient



3. Dealing with death in front of a patient

The patient has the right *to all information* concerning him or her that may be necessary to understand his or her state of health and its likely evolution (art.7, §1).

The communication must take place in *a clear and understandable language* (Art.7, §2, para. 1).

The practitioner should *consider the patient's individuality, including age and education*.

In some cases, the caregiver is allowed *to hide* the truth from the patient. Indeed, the law (art. 7, §4). authorises the professional practitioner, exceptionally, not to disclose the information to the patient if the communication of the information is likely to cause manifest serious harm to the patient's health and provided that another professional practitioner has been consulted.

This exception is temporary: as soon as the communication of the information no longer causes the feared harm, the professional practitioner must communicate it (art.7, §4, para.3).

Patients' Rights Act

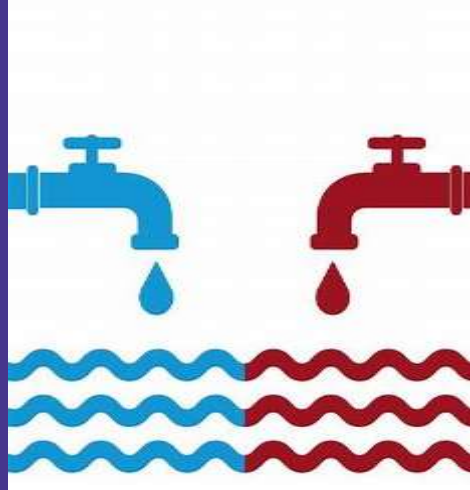
Source :

Paul Mathieu in "The review of palliative care in Wallonia, September 2023"

3. Dealing with death in front of a patient

COMMUNICATION

Cold side :
Communication to make know – to inform



Hot side:
communicate to share

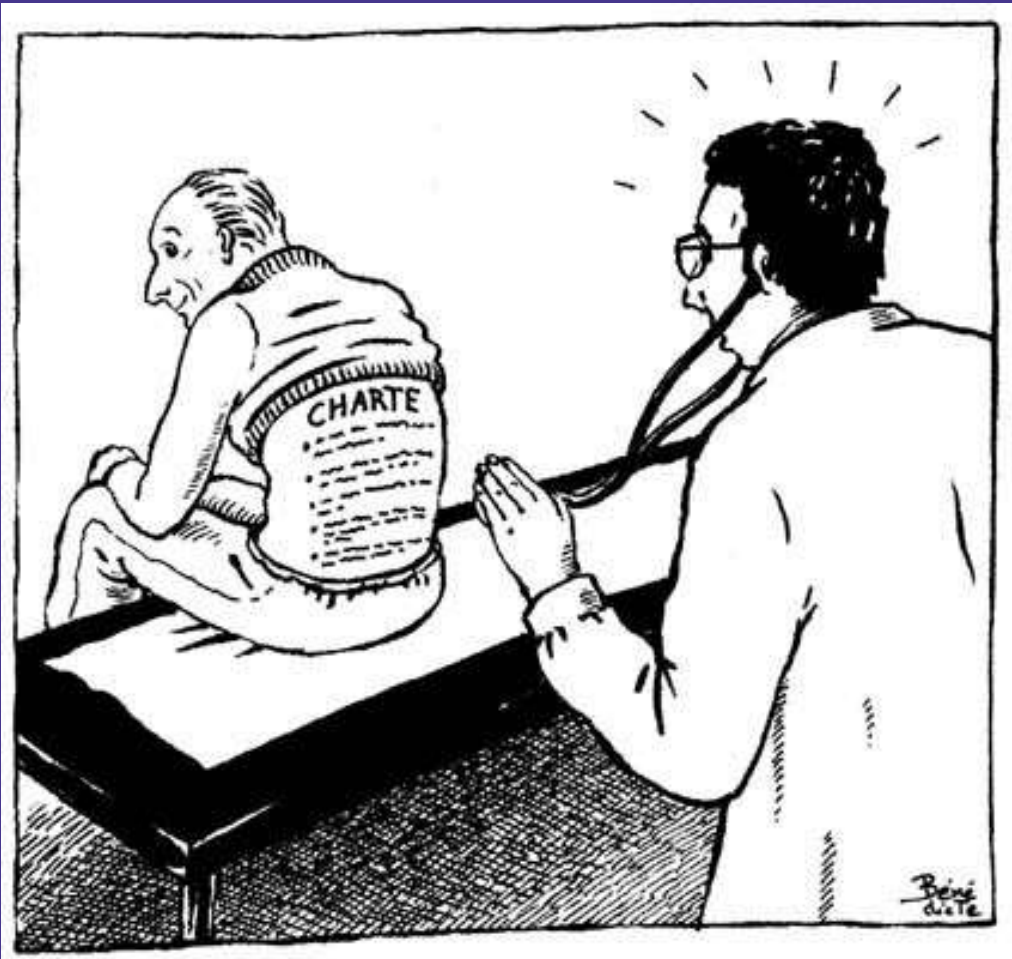
It involves us at a level other than that of rationality, scientific knowledge and medical information.

If the relationship is built **within the patient's own time frame**, in a bond of empathy, presence and trust, we can sometimes see an evolution towards **openness to clearer information**.

3. Dealing with death in front of a patient

- Convey the **seriousness of the situation** and imply that the outcome is approaching.
- Explain the **therapeutic orientation chosen** to best help him/her.
- Do not build loyalty through fear, but **reduce the fear of suffering**.
- Check if the patient **has understood the message**.
- Give the patient the opportunity to talk **freely about their emotions and anxieties**.
- Dare to converse with the patient **about existential questions as well as practical or administrative** subjects (organ donation, will, etc.)

3. Dealing with death in front of a patient



The **clinical examination** offers sometimes the possibility of distancing loved ones in front of which the patient does not always dare to raise his questions

EXISTENCIAL QUESTIONS

If treatment doesn't achieve the desired result, how do you see the future?

Are you thinking about death?

What does death mean to you?

Are you afraid of death?

« There are no "specialists" in death.

*We are all called to be specialists in
accompaniment. »*

Philippe Lebecq, generaliste

3. Dealing with death in front of a patient

Which are the **4 natural ingredients** essential to each communication ?

Listening
sharing
silence
humor (*)



() Humor is like a wiper : it doesn't stop the rain, but it allows you to move forward on your path*

3. Dealing with death in front of a patient

Caregivers sometimes tend **to deny** a patient's impending death. They think they can reassure by ignoring death.

But this attitude prevents patients from expressing themselves and feeling heard.

What are we going to say, what can we say? Are we not adding suffering to the time that remains?



"I'm here with you. You're dying. What is happening to you is completely natural and it is the fate of all of us. I wish you could stay here with me, but I don't want you to suffer any longer. The time we spent together is coming to an end and I will always keep you in my heart. Now, please, don't cling to life anymore. Let it go. I give you, with all my being, permission to die. You're not alone now and you never will be. All my love is with you. «

The Tibetan Book of Life and Death, Tibetan Lama Sogyal Rinpoche

3. Dealing with death in front of a patient

« You're at the end of your life, no treatment is working yet... I've booked you an appointment with palliative care in a month's time. »





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Is it indispensable,
necessary, desirable that
we speak of death in
general?

4. CONCLUSION

Indispensable ?

Everyone is free to talk about death or not. Until the end. This freedom is the very basis of good communication?

Necessary ?

We organize our society around the fear of dying. Rather than learning how to live well.

Yes, it's necessary to talk about death

- To reaffirm the values on which a society is founded : **mutual aid, benevolence, respect for life and death**
- - to reduce ethical tensions. **Tensions between** technical progress (**saving, prolonging life**) and scarcity of resources (**medical and human**), **between** human dignity and societal utility. **And at the heart of these tensions : te weak, the sick, the elderly and the disabled**
- - to reflect on old age

Desirable ?

Yes, talking about death tames our fear, **helps us** to avoid complicated situations and **stimulate us to make** living choices that make sens. **And not only when whe are retired.**

*« Most people die unprepared for death,
the same way they lived, unprepared for
life. »*

Sogyal Rinpoché

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You don't know your deadline,
so don't wait
to talk about death

Death 
& Breakfast

Thank you for listening !