



## **What Should You Do in the Last Months of Your Life?**

**Miss Emily Chen, Project Officer**

For people suffering from advanced cancer or another terminal illness, the plethora of medical terms related to prognosis or treatment options, can feel really overwhelming. No matter how prepared someone feels for these type of conversations, or how well the disease and prognosis is understood. Living with an advanced illness is a challenging experience that creates a lot of confusion and triggers many questions. There are, for example, important decisions to be made with regard to available treatment options and end-of-life planning (including Advanced Care Planning and funeral planning). Patients in this situation might wonder what decisions to make and what they could or should do. Who should they talk to? What options are available? How can others get involved in their care?

Vital Decisions, a company based in New Jersey, comes with a helpful solution for this. Vital Decisions provides a service that assists patients and their family members in reviewing their medical situation, and help them to develop a plan to address different healthcare decisions and concerns. A health care counselor (a trained, licensed clinical social worker) will cold-call patients (they get patient's phone number through insurance company) who are seriously ill and offer counselling on behalf of the beneficiary's insurance plan. After asking consent from the patient, the counselor will have a series of phone sessions with the patient and/or their family members. Throughout these sessions the counselor will build rapport and a relationship with the patient, and help them with, for example, feeling better prepared for unexpected situations that may occur; thinking about the care they want to receive and implementing these decisions proactively during a crisis; and enhancing the communication between patients, doctors, and family members about patient's choices and wishes. Vital Decisions serves about 12,000 cases per year.

Aside from the service they provide over the phone, a new app called "Cake" is also created to assist with making end-of-life decisions. This app will simplify end-of-life planning by asking questions regarding end-of-life decisions, ranging from financial arrangements to the change in Facebook status after death. Some specific question asked in the app are: "do you want to be buried or cremated?" or "what song should be played at your funeral?" With this app, people can easily record and specify their wishes and share them with their friends and family members. One of the founders of the app explained that advanced care planning is essential within the healthcare system, but it proves hard to talk about this issue with others. Therefore, this app will



be a good tool and easy way for people to start talking and thinking about the end of life. By just a few clicks, you can plan your end-of-life decision easily.

References:

<http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2014/08/27/339861118/hello-may-i-help-you-plan-your-final-months>

<http://www.boston.com/business/innovation/2015/10/23/new-app-lets-you-set-your-end-life-preferences-while>