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Receiving Bad News

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Life changes in a heartbeat. Each one of us, someday, will receive a call or face the doctor who tells us bad news. I was in college when the phone rang. "Come quickly your dad has been in a terrible car accident." Life changes in a heartbeat.

So, what do we do when bad news comes? We have to do something – there is a fork in the road – we have to go on with life. But we have to live in the world as a different person. We may even now be living with a God who has acted differently toward us than we expected.

In other words, we have a choice: we can choose to live life boldly and differently or we can sniffle through the rest of our existence until death. I have seen many people fall apart and never truly live again and I have seen others who face the change the bad news brings and turn it into something more beautiful than they ever could have imagined.

Rather than have me prattle on, I thought it would be best to ask dying (hospice) patients what they would like to tell others who just got bad news from their doctor:

- Christina: "If there are any doubts – and there will be – get a second opinion."
- Robert: "Your emotions are God-given – don't live numb from receiving the bad news – face the news, feel the pain, and start living again."
- Al: "Seek community – tell your family everything - don't go it alone."
- Fred: "Don't ever quit."
- Susannah: "Ask your doctor every question you have – even the ones that sound stupid – don't skip even one."
- Suzie: "Talk to your hospice team – treat them like family."
- Jim: "Trust and believe that God is involved in everything that is happening."
- Jack: "Realign your dreams and goals with the new boundaries."
- Carol: "Don't go on as if nothing has happened – be real."
- David: "Don't go to work for a few days – decompress."
- Bob: "If you need your family or friends or hospice team to be with you now, tell them so. And if you need to be alone, tell them that also."
- Randy: "Find a purpose for your remaining days."
- Susan: "Continue to live life with passion."
- Cheryl: "Cultivate an eternal perspective – think about heaven – it gave me peace and comfort."
- Vince: "Hold on to good memories. Relive them."

- Gail: “Go to work, go shopping – keep up your comfortable routines.”
- Joan: “Sit with a yellow memo pad and write down every question that pops into your mind – then ask your doctor, your nurse, your pastor, and your hospice team every last question.”
- Paul: “Complete your life mission.”
- June: “Choose to be joyful.”
- Dan: “Let others help. Don’t face illness and death alone. “
- Barbara: “Serve others. If you feel your usefulness is over, you are wrong.: there are people still waiting for you to serve.”
- Esmera: “It’s OK to cry. Feel the pain and cry awhile, but then tame it. Sorrow can grow into a big monster. Watch out – it can destroy the happiness of your remaining days. “
- Charles: “Cultivate thankfulness for the good things you had and have in life – think about them; look for the good things that remain.”
- Julie: “List the things you always wanted to say or do, then try to do as many as possible - given your resources and limitations.”
- Sam: “Continue to talk with God – ask the tough questions – God is big enough take on even your hardest questions.”
- Eugene: “Say you are sorry. Ask for and give forgiveness.”
- Harold: “Tell you family that you love them.”

Here’s my advice for you: “It is your life – take the pressure off. Feel free to ignore all of the advice given here and live your life in the way you think is best.”

Bad news awaits us all – for some sooner, for some later. Regardless of the length of our remaining days or the physical difficulties within them, hospice and other health care teams can help you live your life as fully as possible. Remember the words of Cecily Saunders, the founder of the modern hospice movement. *“You matter to the last moment of your life, and we will do all we can, not only to help you die peacefully, but to live until you die.”*