

Hope and Hospice

False Hope and Realistic Hope

Source: [Karen Wyatt, MD](#)



Patients with false hope . . .

- . . . continue painful treatments that bring little or no benefit.
- . . . suffer severe side effects from the treatment.
- . . . are too sick to spend meaningful time with family and friends.

Patients with realistic hope . . .

- . . . are aware of the severity of their illness.
- . . . understand that the treatment may not work.
- . . . know that their time is limited.

How can families shift from false hope to realistic hope?

- Listen carefully to your loved one to find out what they want.
- If family members disagree on what course to take, follow the wishes of the patient.
- Be aware of your own biases and fears; keep the focus on the patient.
- Have an open and honest discussion about issues such as the treatment's success rate and the side effects that come with it.
- Focus on meeting challenges in the present moment, while preparing for the worst.

False Hope	Realistic Hope
I'm getting this treatment to cure my cancer.	This treatment may not work but I'm giving it my best try.
I trust the doctor to make me better.	I won't let harmful side effects keep me from time with my family.
We're going to beat this disease.	I know how I want to spend my days.

Tips for talking to the physician:

- Ask for a realistic diagnosis; be assertive if necessary.
- Ask about the success rate of the treatment and the side effects that come with it.
- Have a family member or friend present when talking to the doctor.
- That person should take notes (bring a large notepad).
- It's okay to ask if the doctor thinks it might be time for hospice.



Realistic hope makes several goals possible:

- Task to complete (bucket list)
- Life event to attend (wedding, birth of a child)
- Life review and sharing family stories
- Writing legacy letters
- Giving and receiving forgiveness
- Finding spiritual meaning
- Preparing for a peaceful death

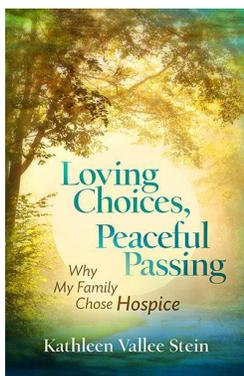


What is precious time?

Jennifer A. O'Brien wrote *The Hospice Doctor's Widow* after her husband, Dr. Bob Lehmsberg died. He was a hospice physician for many years and helped families understand what hospice is by telling them they were in precious time, meaning death is likely, if not imminent. Precious time is when you say what you need to say and don't say what you will later regret.

Below are my memories of the precious time I had with my dad, Bob Vallee.

The last days of Dad's life were meaningful in a way I had never known before. I felt a sense of anticipation, but was aware of the slow, steady march of time. As we finished Dad's earthly affairs, there was a feeling of letting go, of release. When dad talked about his memories, I felt a circle closing, as his journey through life was coming to an end. It was a precious time, and those memories bring me comfort to this day.



Bob Vallee passed peacefully from this life in his own home under the care of his daughter. But first came the most difficult decision he ever had to make. After he died, Ms. Stein was moved to share her experience of the gut-wrenching decision to stop curative care and begin comfort care. The last twenty-nine days of her father's life were some of the richest of his eighty years on earth. Ms. Stein is available to speak to groups about her experience. She can be reached at valleeview.com.