

MORTALITY AND MEDICINE

Navigating the difficult with bravery and empathy

Speaker: Maryanne O'Hara, MFA. Author, certified end-of-life doula



Description:

Patients don't fail when they die. And providers don't fail when they can't ultimately prevent death.

Author, end-of-life doula, and primary caregiver to her late daughter Caitlin, speaker Maryanne O'Hara highlights the power of personal stories to engage and educate providers so they can help patients and their families navigate end-of-life care with bravery and empathy. She speaks to the necessity of patient-centered care that prioritizes active listening, plans for worst-case outcomes, recognizes the critical role of caregivers as part of the patient-provider team, and acknowledges the need for the medical community to honor the reality of mortality. Approved for CME credit.

Learning Objectives

- ✓ Gain valuable insight into the medical system from the perspective of a caregiver.
- ✓ Understand the importance of active listening and provider team alignment when interacting with patients.
- ✓ Recognize the essential role that caregivers play in supporting patients and providers throughout long-term care.
- ✓ Challenge preconceived notions about palliative care and shift away from the belief that patient death equals failure.

‘I just watched your presentation at UPMC. It brought me to tears...I’m glad it was virtual. I will reflect on many of your points and I will try to do better moving forward—being present, listening, communicating....having the hard talks.’

**–Phillip Lamberty, MD
University of Pittsburgh School of Medicine**

“Maryanne O’Hara has transformed the learning of my Narrative Medicine students. Uncertainty, suffering, and grief empowers hope and heroism in each of the living characters—Caitlin, her mother Maryanne, her physicians, and her many friends. Anyone considering a career in medicine or healthcare will find expanded purpose in her story.”

**–Christine Flanagan, Professor of English,
University of the Sciences, Philadelphia**

“I have been to many lectures and seminars over the years, mostly in education, and have never seen a more polished and powerful presentation. I was blown away. Maryanne’s stories, her voice, the photos, Caitlin’s wisdom and light. It’s an incredible gift that she is sharing with the world, and people need to see it.”

–Audience feedback, Harvard Medical School Countway Library Author Series

“Your talk on your experiences through Caitlin’s medical journey and life was hugely moving. The storytelling is so vital to how we practice medicine. Thank you for contributing to our education and growth.”

**–Robert Patton, M.D.
Chief Medical Resident, Inova Fairfax Hospital**



Maryanne O'Hara

Maryanne O'Hara is the author, most recently, of ***Little Matches, A Memoir of Finding Light in the Dark***, published by HarperCollins. ***Little Matches*** is inspired by a blog that Maryanne O'Hara kept while her daughter Caitlin was waiting for a lung transplant. Maryanne and Caitlin's story has been featured in *The New York Times*, *TIME Magazine*, *The Boston Globe*, *Psychology Today*, and ***Little Matches*** is a *People Magazine* Book of the Week. She is also the author of ***Cascade***, a novel (Penguin Random House) which was the Boston Globe Book Club's inaugural pick, a winner of Fiction Honors from the Massachusetts Book Awards, and a story collection which was a finalist for the Flannery O'Connor Award. She holds an MFA in creative writing, has taught creative writing at the college level, and was a longtime editor at the literary journal, *Ploughshares*. After spending time as an end-of-life volunteer in Boston and Pittsburgh, she trained as a certified end-of-life doula at the University of Vermont's Larner College of Medicine in 2019. She lectures on topics including chronic illness, medicine and mortality, the global threat of antimicrobial resistance, bereavement, and secular spirituality.