

# A good death: a film about end-of-life care and advance care planning

Produced by Prof. D Robin Taylor and Paul Trotman

Reviewed by **Prof. Rod MacLeod** PhD, FRCGP, FACHPM; Senior Staff Specialist in Palliative Care, Hammond Care, Sydney, and Conjoint Professor in Palliative Care, University of Sydney, Australia

'A wise physician will consider whether a disease be incurable: if he find it to be such, let him resort to palliation: and alleviate the symptom.' Bacon, Sylva, 1626

The modern palliative care movement has been around for over 40 years and yet many health practitioners still find it hard to provide appropriate management near the end of life. This film is made for people with COPD or serious lung conditions, their families and the doctors and nurses who provide care for them. One of the aims is to introduce the concept of advance care planning and to prompt discussion about patient choices, but the real power of the film is in telling the story of the final illness of Martin Cavanagh as he is accompanied by his wife Tui and their family towards the end of his life. Robin Taylor writes on the website that they 'wanted to make this film because we realised that the care we were providing to patients with respiratory disease at the end of life was missing the mark.' On the evidence provided in this film they have little to be worried about. The care captured on film is exemplary. Professor Taylor is shown as empathetic, forthright and honest in his approach to Martin, the patient, Martin's wife Tui and to the audience of the film. The most striking person on film, however, is Martin himself, who displays dignity and control throughout.

One of the sadnesses pointed out by Professor Taylor is that doctors generally 'do what they are

trained to do.' Sadly, we know that the training provided to young doctors and nurses in end-of-life care is inadequate in many ways. By making this film, the producers have shown that there is power in the telling of stories; there is power in excellent camera work (here by Scott Mouat), and there is power in watching and listening in order to learn. It is well worth listening and watching more than once as there are so many snippets of wisdom contained in the spoken words.

There are weak points. Some of the dialogue is hard to hear (especially through Martin's oxygen mask), but overall the quality of the film-making is very high. The website provides useful web addresses for further information.

This is an important piece of work that should be shown to every New Zealand medical student and as many medical specialists and primary physicians as possible. It is an honest way of indicating the importance of advance care planning and a way of showing that it is possible to have a good death from a chronic disabling disease. I recommend it highly.

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[www.agooddeath.co.nz](http://www.agooddeath.co.nz)