



**HOSPICE**  
OF NORTH IDAHO

Your Local Community Hospice Since 1981

## WHAT MATTERS MOST:

### BEING MORTAL EDUCATIONAL SERIES PART ONE OF TWO

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Atul Gawande, acclaimed author and surgeon, pitches some of life's biggest questions to his readers; questions about our death and how we deal with it. Following interviews with multitudes of people about their experience with a life-limiting disease and interviewing their doctors, Gawande wrote "Being Mortal." The book includes his own experience during his father's decline. In his book and later-developed documentary, Gawande explains what he learned about tough questions, tough decisions, and the various ways people manage fact, reality and fear in the face of death.

In his father's case, there were no certainties for treatment, surgery, or recovery. Gawande writes, "In theory, a person should make decisions about life and death matters analytically, on the basis of facts." Instead, his experience with his father's decline indicated the contrary. Gawande pins the problem saying, "Making choices required somehow filling the gaps, and what my father filled them with was fear."

Encountering patients' fear is not uncommon for clinical staff at our area's local, community-owned Hospice of North Idaho. For 36 years, Hospice of North Idaho has been the area's trusted community Hospice. Last year nearly 4,500 people received hospice care, palliative care, and grief and loss care from this local non-profit. Hospice's approach is to help their patients realize what they most want in their end-of-life experience and to show them the many choices they have.

Fear often clouds over the personal path to self-choice. Hospice's Community Palliative Care Nurse, Peggy Hodge, says, "It is easy for people to feel disempowered after receiving a life-limiting diagnosis, especially if they are not presented with a different perspective. Our philosophy is to provide compassionate care, giving as much information as we have to empower our patients to make decisions they are satisfied with."

After interviewing the most qualified surgeons, Gawande's father chose a doctor who allowed him to ask any question, recognize his underlying fears, and re-direct him toward the root question, "What matters most?" Additionally, and perhaps most gratefully, Gawande describes that the doctor "had made the effort to understand what my father cared about most."

With the right approach, they moved through the fear and started making choices based on what matters.

This is why Hospice of North Idaho serves the way they do. The question, "What matters most?" is intimate, thought provoking, and arouses dialogue. What does it take to get to the point of answering that question? For someone currently experiencing new, possibly terrifying news, it takes expert skill, intuitive insight, and trusted answers.

Kelly Rey, Hospice of North Idaho Director of Social Services helps our community walk through that process. "We, as a society, don't really talk about our wishes for our death. We do have a choice to die with peace and dignity, without pain, regrets, or suffering."

She encourages community members to start now, exploring what really matters most. "Rather than wait, start contemplating what you view as a good death. Allowing yourself to understand and overcome fears about death, will help you live a more intentional and fulfilling life."

Read Part 2, printed next Wednesday to learn more about discovering personal choice, empowerment, and what matters most, right now.

Discover end-of-life approaches and discuss considerations with Hospice of North Idaho experts. Attend the free viewing and discussion of the Frontline documentary "Being Mortal" at the Coeur d'Alene Public Library, 702 East Front Street, November 8th at 10:30AM. Refreshments provided by the Friends of the Library.