

death is but a dream

STUDY GUIDE



"DYING IS A PARADOX. PHYSICALLY YOU ARE DECLINING, BUT SPIRITUALLY AND EMOTIONALLY YOU ARE VIVID, ALIVE, AND PRESENT." - DR. CHRISTOPHER KERR

About The Film

Christopher Kerr is a hospice doctor. All of his patients die. Yet he has cared for thousands of patients who, in the face of death, speak of love and grace. Beyond the physical realities of dying are unseen processes that are remarkably life-affirming. These include dreams that are unlike any regular dream.

Described as "more real than real," these end-of-life experiences resurrect past relationships, meaningful events and themes of love and forgiveness; they restore life's meaning and mark the transition from distress to comfort and acceptance.

In *Death Is But A Dream*, Dr. Kerr leads the audience through intimate interviews with the dying where the viewer can experience the immense power of the dreams and visions first hand. The film paints a compelling and deeply moving portrait of the profoundly healing nature of the dying process and shows the great comfort these experiences can provide to the families they leave behind.

A film of comfort, hope, and a genuinely uplifting look at death



ABOUT HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE BUFFALO (HPCB)

Hospice & Palliative Care Buffalo is committed to providing palliative and end-of-life care, holistic support, advocacy, and education to those impacted by serious illness and loss. Located in Buffalo, New York, it is one the largest non-profit hospice and palliative care organizations in the United States,

caring for approximately 1,000 individuals daily throughout Erie County, NY. To learn more, please visit:

www.hospicebuffalo.com.



ABOUT THE FILMAKER

MONICA DE LA TORRE

DIRECTOR & PRODUCER

Born and raised in Los Angeles and of Mexican heritage, Monica De La Torre began her career in production at Walt Disney Imagineering as Production Coordinator for theme parks. She left to help the family business and renovate a 120 year old historic and famously haunted boutique hotel in Santa Paula, CA. What began as a two-year renovation project, developed into a ten year long revival of the hotel and the town with a variety of productions filming on location which inspired her to pursue film.



Monica De La Torre's directorial debut, *Death Is But A Dream* is shifting the tragically flawed paradigm of the death and dying experience. The new model of dying is one of hope and dreams.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Death is But a Dream Film website

<http://www.deathisbutadream.com>

Dr. Kerr's website also offers additional information on the research as well as helpful strategies for those encountering end-of-life dreams and visions.

<http://www.drchristopherkerr.com>

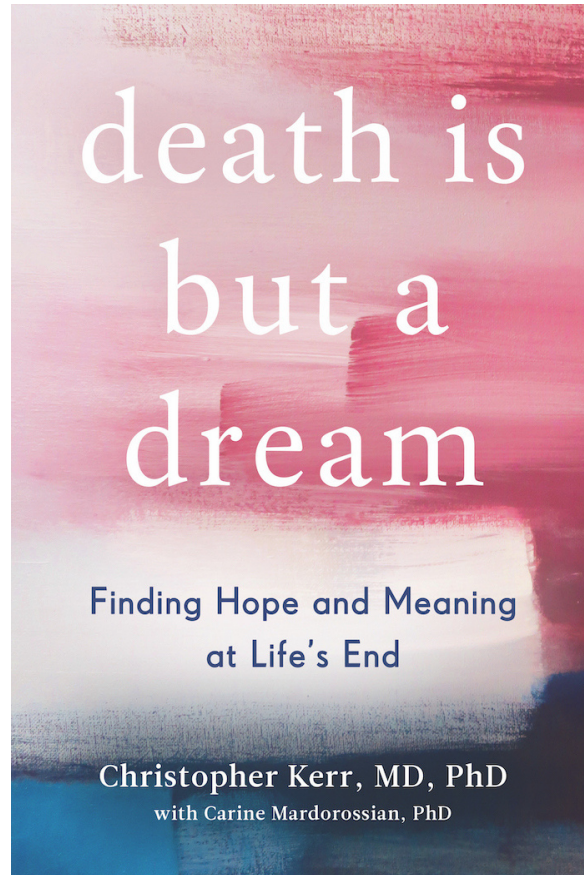
"I See Dead People: Dreams and Visions of the Dying". Dr. Christopher Kerr's TEDx Buffalo talk This 2015 TEDx has received millions of view and is a fantastic and concise talk to introduce others to the topic of end-of-life dreams and visions.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rbnBe-vXGQM>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES (CONT'D)

Death is But a Dream book by Dr. Christopher Kerr



Death is But a Dream: Finding Hope and Meaning at Life's End, written by Dr. Christopher Kerr, CEO and CMO of Hospice, is the first book to validate dreams and visions that bring comfort as death nears. Drawing on interviews with over 1,400 patients and more than a decade of quantified data, Dr. Kerr reveals that pre-death dreams and visions are extraordinary occurrences that humanize the dying process. He shares how his patients' stories point to death as not solely about the end of life, but as the final chapter of humanity's transcendence. Kerr's book also illuminates the benefits of these phenomena for the bereaved, who find solace in seeing their loved ones pass with a sense of calm closure.

Beautifully written, with astonishing real-life characters and stories, this book is at its heart a celebration of our power to reclaim the dying process as a deeply meaningful one. Death Is But a Dream is an important contribution to our understanding of medicine's and humanity's greatest mystery. This book can be used as companion reading to the film and is strongly recommended.

The book was released Feb 11th, 2020 by Penguin Random House Publishing and is available for order at all major retailers: <https://www.drchristopherkerr.com/#order>

KEY TERMS

The film you are about watch about is focused on the dreams and visions of dying individuals in hospice care. Here are some key terms that may be helpful before watching the film.

End-of-Life Dreams and Visions

- End-of-Life Dreams and Visions (ELDVs) are significant, subjective experiences within the dying process that occur while asleep (dreams) or awake (visions). They can happen hours, weeks, or even months before a person passes and may become more common as a patient nears death. They may include, but are not limited to, seeing or interacting with deceased family members, friends, pets, and religious figures. They may also depict experiences related to themes such as traveling or preparing to travel. However, it is important to note that ELDVs are highly subjective and individualized.
- Example: Norb walked into his wife Dawn's room in the hospice inpatient unit one morning to find her saying in a sing-song voice, "I'm going home. I'm going home." It continued throughout the morning and later Norb noticed Dawn staring at the ceiling. He finally asked, "Dawn, what are you staring at so hard up there?". She replied with a smile, "It's the angels. They're coming down to take me home to heaven." Those were the last words he heard her say.

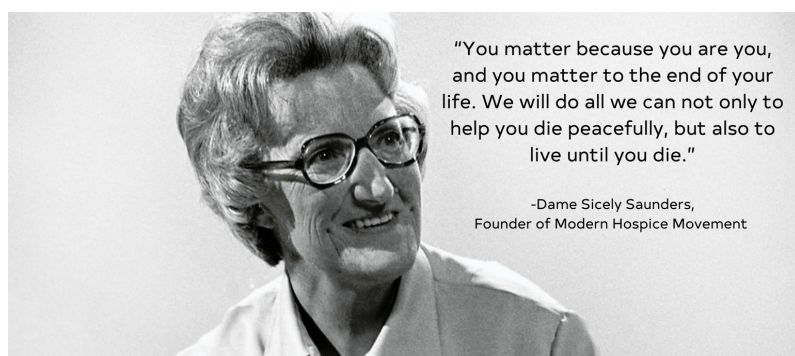
Hospice Care

Hospice care is a compassionate approach to end-of-life care.

"At the center of hospice care is the belief that each of us has the right to die pain-free and with dignity, and that our families will receive the necessary support to allow us to do so. Hospice care focuses on the pain, symptoms, and stress of serious illness during the terminal phase. The terminal phase is defined by Medicare Benefit in the United States as an individual with a life expectancy of 6-months or less if the disease runs its natural course. This care is provided by an interdisciplinary team who provides care encompassing the individual patient and their family's holistic needs."

-The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

For more information about hospice care, please visit: <https://www.nhpco.org/hospice-care-overview/hospice-faqs/>



Palliative Care

"Palliative care is specialized medical care for people living with a serious illness. This type of care is focused on providing relief from the symptoms and stress of the illness. The goal is to improve quality of life for both the patient and the family.

Palliative care is provided by a specially-trained team of doctors, nurses and other specialists who work together with a patient's other doctors to provide an extra layer of support. Palliative care is based on the needs of the patient, not on the patient's prognosis. It is appropriate at any age and at any stage in a serious illness, and it can be provided along with curative treatment."

-The Center to Advance Palliative Care

To learn more about palliative care, please visit: <https://www.capc.org/about/palliative-care/>

End-of-Life Dreams and Visions Self-Reflection Worksheet

Before watching the film, it may be helpful to explore your own personal views on the subject of death, dying, and end-of-life dreams and visions. We invite you to reflect on the statements below and fill in the worksheet. If the opportunity presents itself, discuss your answers with others who have also completed this exercise.

Death and Dying

	Agree or Disagree	Explain
Death is a natural and unavoidable part of life.		
I do not like to think about or talk about death.		
Dying is a morbid and depressing experience.		
I like to think there is life after death.		
Thinking about my own death causes me anxiety.		
Death is neither good or bad.		

General question: What are my general thoughts and feelings about dying?

End-of-life Dreams and Visions (ELDVs)

	Agree or Disagree	Explain
ELDVs are caused by drug-induced hallucinations.		
I have personal experience with someone having ELDVs.		
ELDVs are a result of a dying brain.		
ELDVs are a natural part of the dying experience.		
ELDVs is evidence that there is life after death.		
Only adults can have ELDVs.		

General question: What are my general thoughts and feelings about ELDVs

Part 2: While Watching the Film

Impact on Patient and Families

As you watch this film, there stories shared by dying patients and families about end-of-life dreams and visions (ELDV). Please identify how you see ELDVs may have impacted them and/or what these experiences may have meant to them.

Impact on Dying Patient	Elaborate
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

Impact on Family Members	Elaborate
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.

ELDV's can often be mistaken for confusional states that can occur at the end of life (e.g. delirium). While watching the patients share their experience, we invite you to not only listen to what they are describing, but also pay attention to how they are saying it, their mood, their facial expressions, etc. Afterwards, you can consider filling the table below and reflect on each of their sphere of being.

Sphere of Being	Description
Physical <i>e.g. What is their body language like?</i>	
Cognitive <i>e.g. What is their mental state like?</i>	
Relational <i>e.g. How are they relating or connecting to the people they are talking to?</i>	
Emotional <i>e.g., How is the ELDV making them feel?</i>	
Mental <i>e.g. What is their cognitive state like?</i>	

Existential or Spiritual

*e.g. If they are, how are they making sense of the experience?
Are they connecting it to something bigger than themselves?*

Looking at what you've filled out, would you consider any of these patients to be confused or out of touch with reality? Please explain.

Part 3: After Watching the Film

Here are some questions to consider exploring by yourself or others after watching the film.

What are your main takeaways from the film?

What emotions did you feel when watching the film?

What surprised you in the film? What do you want to know more about?

What new insights, if any, has the film given you regarding the dying process? Has any of your preconceived notions been challenged?

Has anyone in your life had an ELDV? How was that experience for you and others?

What did you learn about ELDVs in this film? Have your views on this phenomenon changed?

The research in this film focused on the impact of ELDVs and not the source. What are your thoughts and feelings on that?

The medical community was relatively silent when the ELDV research was published. Why do you think that is?

Do you believe that ELDVs are important?

How can healthcare professionals better support the dying experience? What about the ELDV experience?

Diving deeper: When it's time for you do die, who or what would you like to dream about?

**Death is a moment, dying is really a
process.**

- Dr. Christopher Kerr

Part 4: Wrapping up

Revisiting Your Self-Reflection Exercise

Now that you've watched the film and learned more about the dying process and end-of-life dreams and visions, please revisit your responses that were in your self-reflection exercise. Has anything changed or remained the same? If the opportunity presents itself, please discuss with others who have also watched the film and completed this worksheet.

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Thinking about my own death causes me anxiety.		
Death is neither good or bad.		

General question: What are my general thoughts and feelings about dying? Has anything changed since watching the film?

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