The background is a dark blue gradient with a series of curved, glowing lines that create a sense of depth and movement, resembling a tunnel or a stylized architectural structure. The lines are more prominent on the right side and fade into the dark background on the left.

Making Peace with Death: Yours, Mine, Ours

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Learning Objectives

- To recognize that euphemisms distance us from reality
- To explore pros and cons of phrases used at the time of death
- To gain a little more peace with death

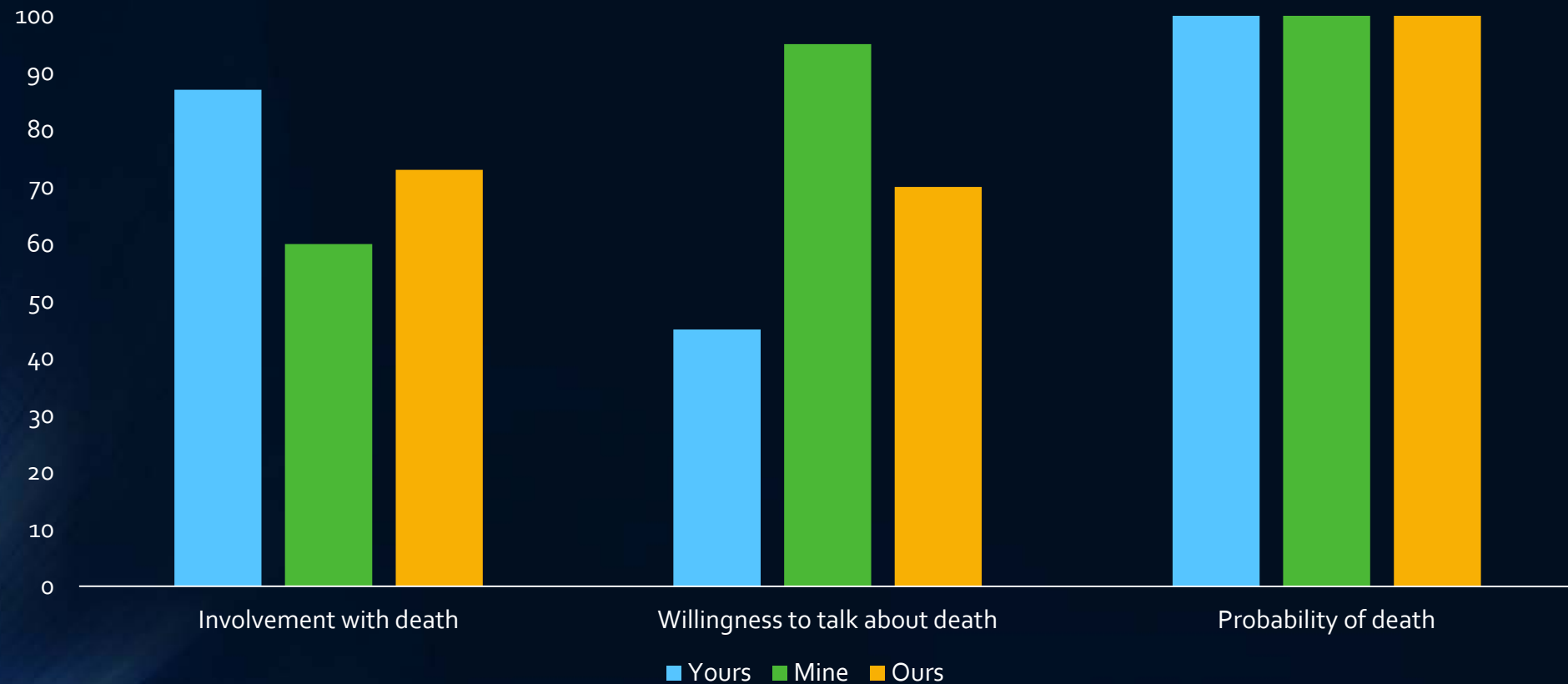
Show of hands

How many of you deal with death somewhat regularly?

How many of you are comfortable talking about death openly?

How many of you will actually die one day?

This cool slide came with the template,
so I thought I'd use it



What happens with the unknown?



We fear it

So what can be more unknown than death?

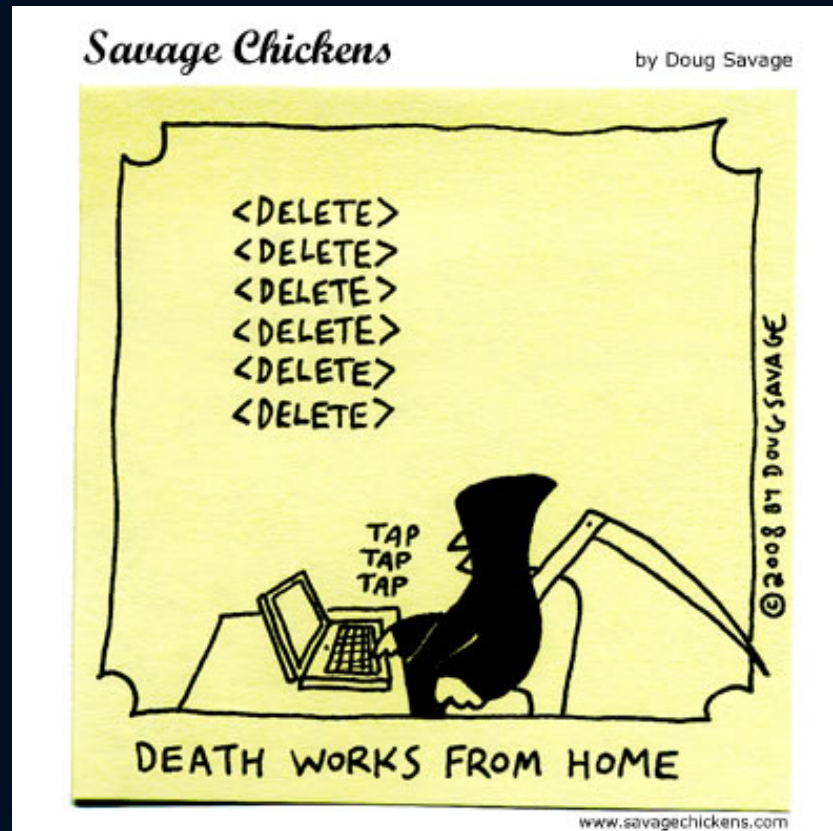
- Nobody really knows what happens after we die
- Possibilities based upon Faith/Speculation/Hope
- A loss of all that we actually do know
- Non-existence is scary

Factors that might make us uncomfortable with death:

- Unknown outcome (Is there anything? Will we be judged?)
- Unknown cause (Will it be painful? Will we know we are dying?)
- Reminder of people who've died who we now miss
- Reminder that we will die too

How do we cope?

- Humor



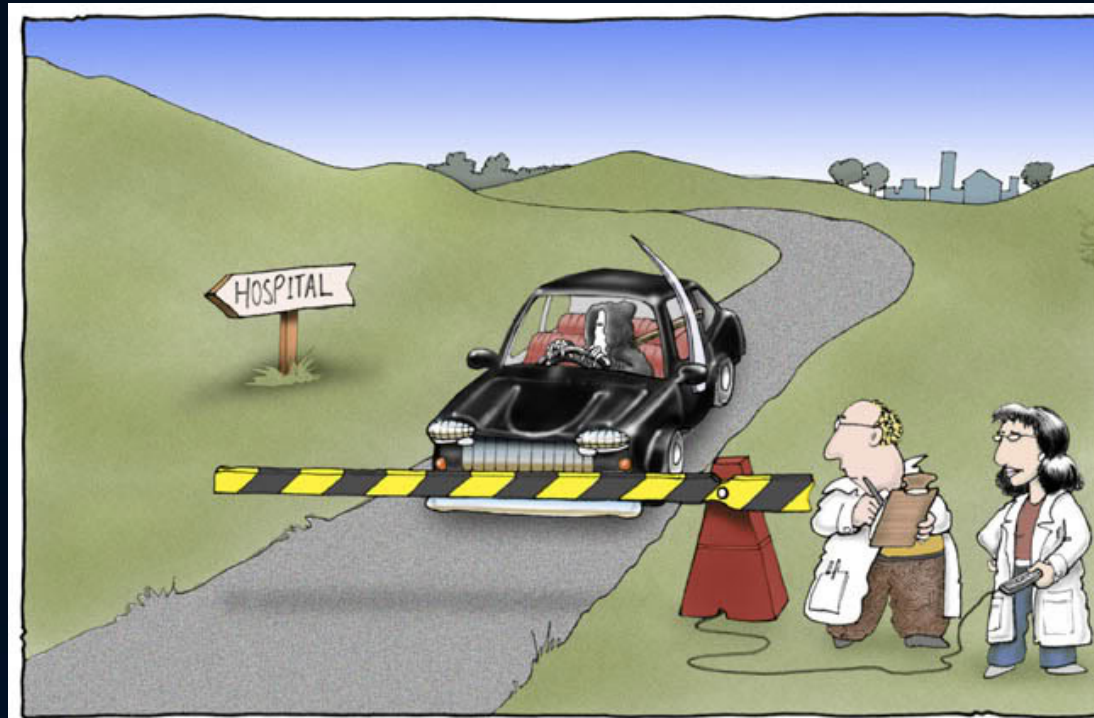
How do we cope?

- Humor



How do we cope?

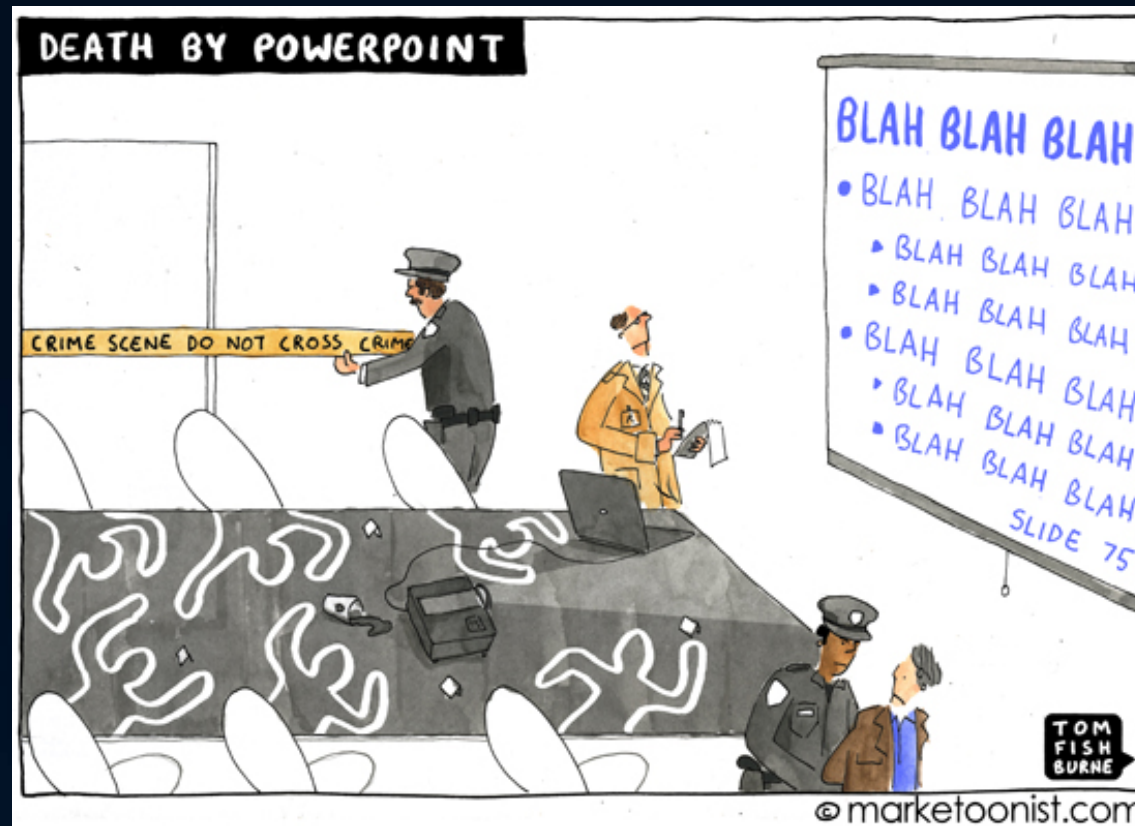
- Humor



Scientists devise yet another way of delaying death.

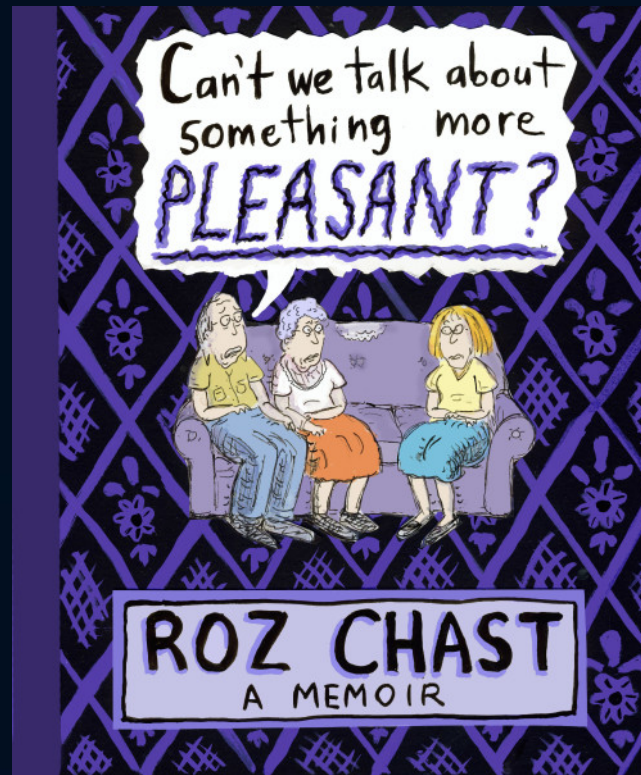
How do we cope?

- Humor



How do we cope?

- Humor
- Denial – Avoidance



How do we cope?

- Humor
- Denial – Avoidance
- Soften the blow with euphemisms

Top ten death euphemisms

1. Taking a dirt nap
2. Kicked the bucket
3. Bought the farm
4. Six feet under / Pushing up daisies
5. Met his maker
6. Departed
7. Didn't make it
8. Expired
9. Passed away
10. Lost him/her

Numerous death euphemisms

Taking a dirt nap Punched his ticket Went to sleep

Croaked Kicked the bucket Cashed in his chips

Bought the farm Bit the dust Is feeding the worms

Gone to a better place Six feet under / Pushing up daisies

Met his maker Hour had come Departed

Shuffled off this mortal coil Didn't make it Checked out

Expired Not with us anymore Lost him/her

Gone to the big _____ in the sky Passed away

Gave up the ghost At rest

Euphemisms “help” because they

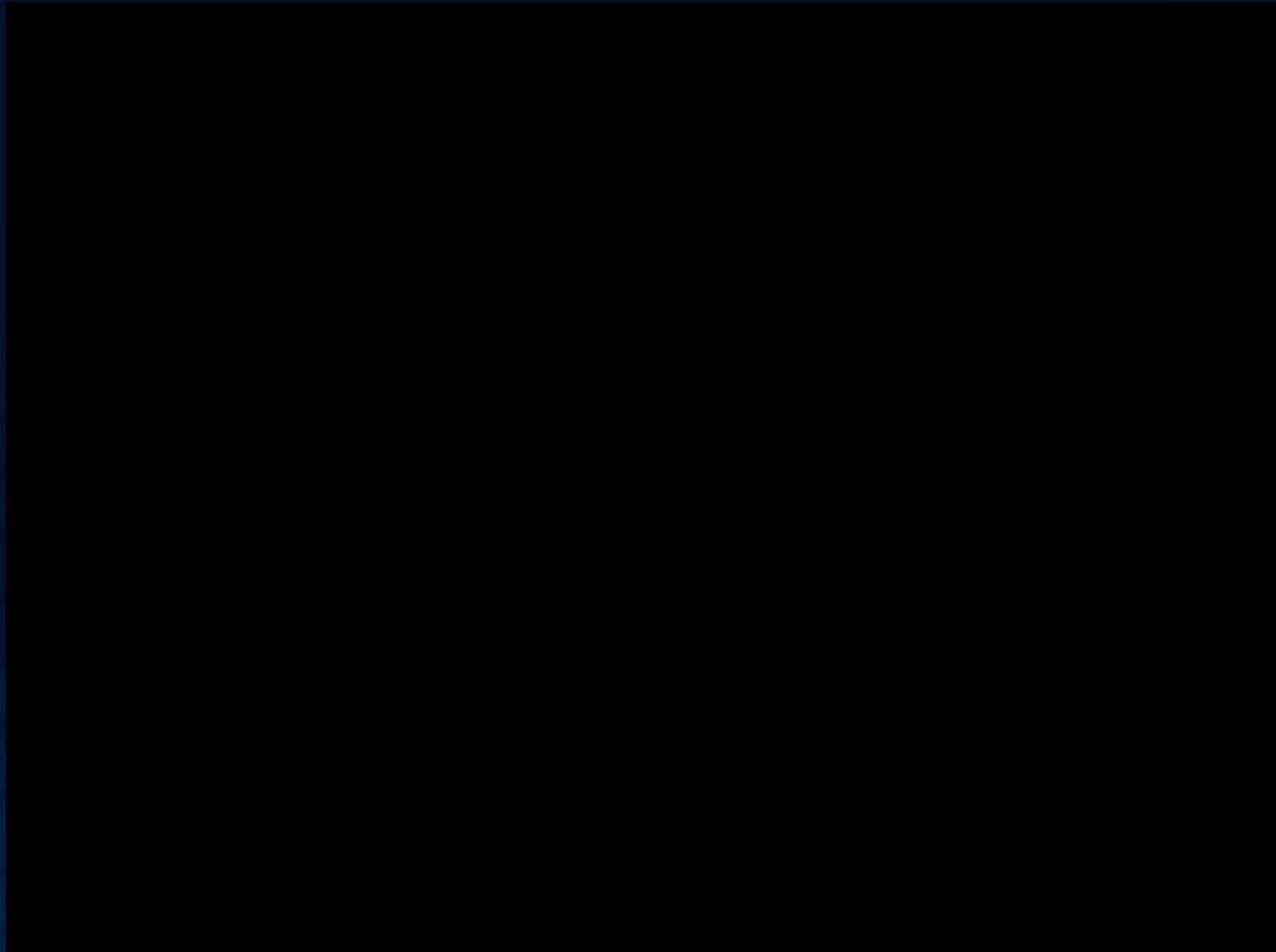
- Keep us from having to say die/death/dead/dying
- Allow us to feel like we’re keeping our distance
- Feel less blunt
- Sound more polite

Euphemisms don't help because they

- Keep us from having to say die/death/dead/dying
- Perpetuate denial by keeping distant from the reality
- Allow death to have more power to intimidate us
- Can interrupt good grieving
- Can be confusing or misinterpreted

Arrested Development

"We lost him"



In a healthcare setting it's okay to

- Say die/death/dead/dying
- Die (hospital practices often seem to want to hide it)
- Grieve (feel angry, sad, guilty, confused, forgetful, etc)
- Advocate for the dying
- Just be present and not actually say anything

Sometimes we open our mouths
with good intent
and something less helpful can be heard

Surviving Death

A PRACTICAL
GUIDE
TO CARING
FOR THE DYING
& BEREAVED

CHARLES MEYER

Twenty-Third
Publications/Bayard
Mystic, CT
© 2000

Saying:

“(You have to) be strong”

Intent:

You can survive this difficult time

Possible interpretation:

You must deny any grief feelings you have, or at least stifle them

Saying:

“Have faith!”

Intent:

Your belief can help you to survive this difficult time

Possible interpretation:

Your faith wasn't strong enough to keep death from happening

Saying:

“Everything happens for a reason”

Intent:

This death is beyond our control

Possible interpretation:

You must have done something to deserve this and God/the Universe finally paid you back

Saying:

“S/he is no longer there. It’s just a shell.”

Intent:

The soul is now with God

Possible interpretation:

Detach yourself from your loved one and move on
or we’d like you to leave the hospital soon

Saying:

“God must have wanted him/ It was God’s will/ God took him”

Intent:

Your loved one is now celebrating with God

Possible interpretation:

God is responsible for this death and squashed your loved one like an ant

Saying:

“S/he is in a better place now”

Intent:

Either your loved one is now celebrating with God
or your loved one is free from pain and suffering

Possible interpretation:

Being here with you wasn't good enough

At the time of death: Some suggestions dealing with others

- Listen to what the patient/family is saying to know what you might say
- If you're unsure, stick with "I'm sorry"
- Ask before you hug someone
- Remember that grief affects people differently
 - What worked for one family might not work for another
 - Don't take their responses personally

Before death: Some suggestions dealing with yourself

- Consider how death is a daily process
 - Bodily: numerous cells die every day (with new cells often created)
 - Psychologically: old images of ourselves die
- Think about death as letting go
 - Parents / children
 - Control
 - Earthly connections / Possessions
- Live as if today is your last

“If you seriously want to be of help to dying patients and their families, take the time to come to terms with your own death...Make a will. Plan your funeral arrangements. Compose a healthcare durable power of attorney and sign a Living Will [*in Oregon, an Advance Directive*]. Talk with your family or significant others about your plans and wishes.


“If you do not do these things yourself, you are very likely to avoid the subject with dying patients and possibly not even hear them cautiously bring up their concerns. When you have made your plans, faced the fearful issue of your own demise, and explored with someone close to you the feelings of anger, disappointment, hope or surprise about your own death, you will be more comfortable, open, and effective in being with others who are dying.

“And you also will have begun your own process of surviving the inevitable deaths of people you love.”

Charles Meyer, Surviving Death

In summary

- You'll help our death-phobic culture if you avoid using euphemisms and actually say the words die/death/dead/dying
- Comments that are intended to be helpful may be interpreted differently – this is not to discourage you from speaking to the grieving, but to encourage awareness
- The more comfort you gain with your own death, the more you'll be able to help others with theirs

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