

# AOSW 2026



## Annual Conference

**June 10-12, 2026**

Portland Marriott Downtown Waterfront  
Portland, Oregon USA

**Pre-Conferences: June 9, 2026**

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# Connecting the past, present and future: Utilizing legacy planning throughout the cancer care continuum

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# Program Objectives:



1. Examine the historical background and key literature on legacy work, emphasizing its development and relevance in current social work practice.
2. Demonstrate clinical skills and interventions applicable across practice settings and throughout a patient's continuum of care.
3. Highlight the benefits of establishing interdisciplinary collaboration to create and implement psychosocial processes and honor patient legacies during end-of-life care.



# What is Legacy?

There are no set rules and legacy work can be unique person to person. <sup>1</sup>

Legacy work is a way for patients to write their own story to share their experiences and wisdom with future generations. <sup>2</sup>



It utilizes clinical skills and “is better understood as process, not product”. <sup>8</sup>

Implementing life review as part of legacy work is supported by Erickson’s theory of developmental stages: integrity versus despair.

# Erickson's Stages of Development



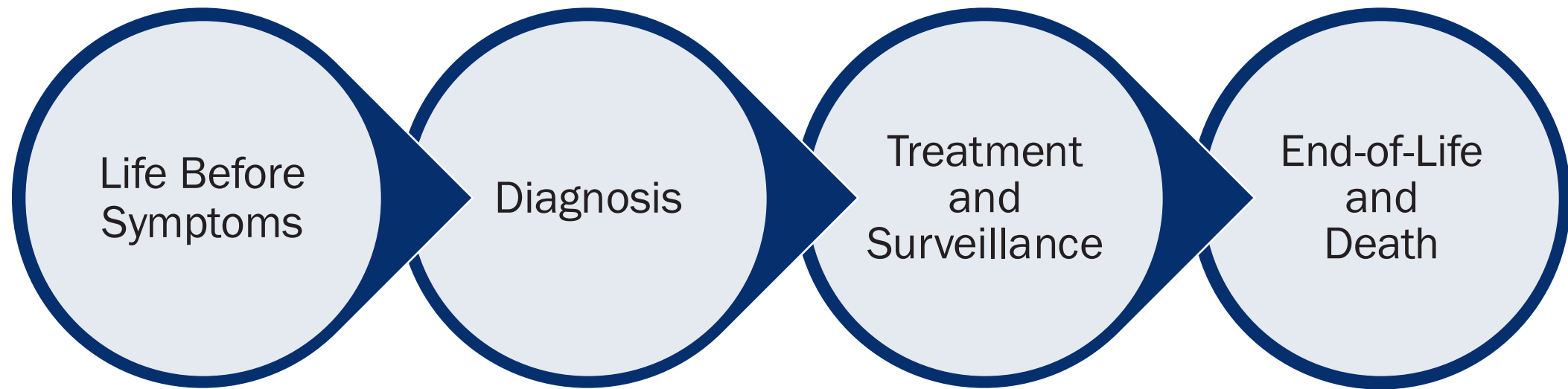
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“While there is a fixed sequence, resolution can be a life-long process, reactivated at various times depending on life events that affect the ego strength or maldeveloped belief patterns.”<sup>13</sup>

# Literature Review

- Legacy work can be defined through a therapeutic lens, helping patients craft their story and reflect on what their life has meant. Legacy work should be implemented through an interdisciplinary framework as specifically included in the Clinical Practice Guidelines for Quality Palliative Care. <sup>3</sup>
- Research shows that legacy work helps facilitate conversation between patients, families and staff to improve communication before a death. <sup>4</sup>
- Open communication before a patient's death impact how people grieve and memorialize a person. <sup>5</sup>
- According to the Association for Clinical Oncology, “High-quality communication ideally starts at the time of a patients' cancer diagnosis, allows space for and response to patient emotions, elicits patients' values and care preferences, and is iterative and longitudinal.” <sup>7</sup>

# Cancer as Continuum of Care





# Meet Our Patient



- Name: Anna Hall
- Age: 31
- Diagnosis: triple negative breast cancer
- Martial status: single
- Living situation: alone, independently
- Insurance: VA
- Income: middle school teacher
- Support system: limited, sister and friends
- Religion: Christian, non-practicing
- Military: Veteran - Marine

# Role Play – Discussing the Past



- Psychosocial Assessment and Life Review
- Concrete Needs
- Adjustment Concerns
- Introduce Legacy Activities
- Time constraints in the outpatient setting



# Legacy Work Interventions

- Psychosocial Assessments: Life review to understand a patient's past.
  - Impact on support system and goals of care
  - Identify concrete needs and potential complications
- Narrative Therapy: Storytelling to make sense of their life.
  - Re-author their story
  - The end of the story is not written by default when diagnosed with cancer.
- Motivational Interviewing: Helping patients identify and change behaviors in their life.
  - Focus on autonomy
  - Utilizes reflective listening



# During Treatment ...



- Anna sought assistance for increased symptoms.
- She was admitted for a full work-up.
- Medical team discovered metastasis.
- She was diagnosed with Leptomeningeal disease (LMD).
- She was encouraged to include her support system.
- Discharged with home health and DME.

# Role Play – Focusing on the Present



- Concrete Needs
- Military Benefits
- Advance Directives
- Anticipatory Grief
- Offer Legacy Activities



# Anticipatory Grief: How Does Legacy Work Intersect?



- Anticipatory grief, a term used to describe the myriad of emotions an individual experiences in anticipation of an impending loss; addressing anticipatory grief can help prepare someone for the loss as it occurs.<sup>9</sup>
- In the oncology setting, loss is not associated only with end of life. Losses occur throughout the patient's and family's cancer journey. Each loss is unique which provides an opportunity for legacy work and acknowledgment of anticipatory grief.
- "Grief is more complicated than the five stages initially outlined by Elisabeth Kübler-Ross and is not linear in how we experience it."<sup>10</sup>

# Moffitt Legacy Activities





# End of Life Care



- Anna was admitted for management of symptoms but continued to decline.
- Medical team recommended comfort measures only.
- Hospice consult placed.
- Veteran Pinning Ceremony offered to Anna; family included.

# Role Play – Preparing for Death



- Referrals for Concrete Needs
- Final Arrangements
- Acknowledgement of Military Service
- Facilitate Legacy Activities



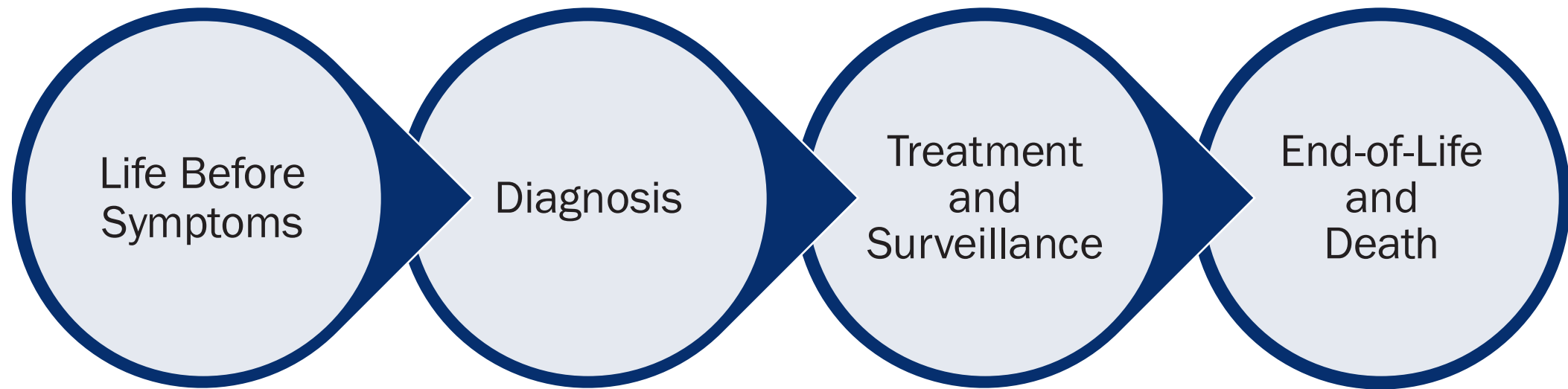


# Benefits of Legacy Work

- The Medical University of South Carolina provides a memory stone activity and implemented a review process to assess the benefit of their program. Their survey of families AND staff members showed that 92% of respondents reported the legacy activity was “meaningful”.<sup>6</sup>
- For our Veteran patients, some organizations offer Pinning Ceremonies. If available, Veteran volunteers facilitate these, which encourage patients to openly discuss their military experience. Often, this support can help a patient ‘find closure’ before their death.<sup>11</sup>



# Legacy Work Across the Continuum





*Thank  
you*



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