

John Ellershaw
Professor of Palliative Care, University of Liverpool and Director, Marie Curie
Palliative Care Institute Liverpool

"How people die remains in the memory of those who live on" ... Dame Cicely Saunders, Founder of the Modern Hospice Movement.

The National End of Life Care Strategy for England promoting high quality care for all adults at end of life was published in July 2008, around half a million people die in England each year, of whom almost two thirds are aged over 75. These deaths increasingly follow a period of chronic illness such as Heart Disease, Cancer, Stroke, Renal Disease, Chronic Respiratory Disease, Neurological Disease or Dementia. 58% of deaths occur in NHS Hospitals with around 18% occurring at home, 17% in Care Homes, 4% in Hospices and 3% elsewhere.

At an individual level what constitutes a good death involves :-

- Being treated as an individual with dignity and respect
- Being without pain and other symptoms
- Being in familiar surroundings
- Being in the company of close family and/or friends

The profile of End of Life Care within the NHS and Social Care Services has been relatively low, the aim of this strategy is to make a step change in access to high quality care for all people approaching the end of life.

The End of Life Care Strategy looks at Whole Systems and a Care Pathway approach highlighting key elements and steps on the pathway that need to be delivered in the context of Health & Social Care. The National End of Life Care Strategy is complimented by the Strategic Health Authorities next stage review where End of Life Care is one of the eight Clinical Pathways. This is a unique moment in time for a significant improvement to be made in healthcare for End of Life Care for patients and their carers.