

FCA REPORT



Body & organ donation discussion draws crowd to annual meeting

By Pam Thomas, FCA-GKC Vice President, and Lynn Anderson, FCA-GKC Volunteer



Pam Thomas, FCA-GKC vice president, moderates a panel about organ transplant and whole-body donation at the organization's annual meeting.

On Friday, Nov. 2, an eager crowd gathered at the Kauffman Conference Center for the FCA-GKC's 2018 annual meeting. Besides conducting basic business, these yearly meetings feature experts in topics of interest to local professionals who deal with end-of-life issues. A continuing focus is on serving residents who face financial challenges. Social workers traditionally find the program of high value, as do interested lay people.

This year's meeting centered on body-donation and organ transplant programs, the logistics of the programs' guidelines, ethical questions, and pragmatic steps surviving loved ones will need to take.

This year's featured presenters:

- Megan Maciel, LCSW, community engagement coordinator with the Midwest Transplant Network (MTN);
- Patricia Yewell, who coordinates the Willed Body Program; and Dale Abrahamson, PhD, chair of the Anatomy and Cell Biology Department, both with the University of Kansas Medical Center (KUMC);
- Barth Wright, PhD, chair of anatomy and professor of anatomy, and Felicia Harris, gift body coordinator, Kansas City University of Medicine and Biosciences (KCUMB) Gift Body Program.
- Pam Thomas, PhD, FCA-GKC vice president, emceed the day's events. Thomas was on the faculty of KCUMB and former president of the Missouri State Anatomical Board.

Perhaps the most vital message for meeting participants was this: Donation of a body gives medical students and researchers the ability to learn, practice, and appreciate the realities of the human body, serving as a crucial adjunct to book and classroom learning. And the donation by one deceased person of organs and tissue can give the gift of life, sight, or social acceptance to as many as eight living people. Some other key messages:

Anatomy instruction

Anatomy labs have strict security procedures in place and photography is not permitted. New embalming techniques are being adopted, providing more realistic, enhanced learning by medical students, residents, and physicians. Anatomy faculty and students appreciate the magnitude of the gift of body donation, treat bodies with utmost respect, hold a tribute to the deceased when the class ends, and incorporate their learning experiences into their eventual practices.

Because the remains of donated bodies are cremated or buried by the institution, body donation can be a helpful option for families with financial challenges. Through the U.S. Uniform Anatomical Gift Act and the International Federation of Associations of Anatomists, ethical considerations guide all facets of anatomy research and education.

Organ and tissue donation

The Midwest Transplant Network is the organ procurement organization for our area. MTN coordinates the donation of organs and tissues among hospitals, potential donors, and donor families. Through the Department of Motor Vehicles, which is the easiest way to become an organ donor (just sign the back of your driver's license), Kansas and Missouri are among the states with the highest rate of donation.

The primary organs transplanted are the lungs, heart, liver, kidney, pancreas, and intestines. Tissue transplant can include the cornea, heart valves, skin, bone, tendons, and veins. Currently in the United States, about 115,000 people are on waiting lists for donation of critical organs,

See Annual, page 2

Expanded price survey educates consumers in wider geographic area

By Kathleen Foster, FCA-GKC Board Member

As the only FCA affiliate in Kansas and Missouri, we at FCA-GKC try our best to serve as much of our region as possible. Our board members answer quite a few calls and emails each month from folks outside our metropolitan area. While we are usually able to give advice or comfort, there is one question we are often unable to answer: "Can you help me find the best funeral price in my hometown?"

With this in mind, we decided to broaden our horizons, and we set to work last fall on expanding our price survey outward, starting first in northeast Kansas.

Taking some lessons from our 2018 survey, we tried to do as much of the surveying as possible remotely, knowing we would also need the help of dedicated volunteers in Kansas. Board president Ginny Farney spearheaded the effort, researching funeral homes in that part of the state and sending letters to solicit their price lists. We received some responses in the mail fairly quickly and were able to put those prices into spreadsheets to be sent to our treasurer, David Johnson, for final review.

But after a while, the lists stopped coming. And when funeral homes don't reply to your letters, there is only so much that can be done without paying a visit in person. We would have been stymied if not for our volunteer in Topeka, Greta Trimble, who was our boots on the ground. While we worked here in Kansas City, Greta called and visited funeral homes in and around Topeka to retrieve and wade through the remaining price lists. Her knowledge of

the local landscape was essential in determining the geographic scope of our project. Without her help the survey would not have been nearly as robust as our final product, which includes the prices of nearly 30 funeral homes in Topeka, Lawrence, Ottawa, and outlying areas. We are excited to share the results of this newest survey, which can be found on our website, funeralskc.org.

I would be remiss if I did not mention our departed colleague Lyle Van Vleet, who created the format that has become the standard for our funeral price surveys and advised us on the outset of this endeavor. We'll miss the enthusiasm and heart he brought to the board and our price survey team.

I think many of us who have worked on price surveys with the FCA-GKC would agree with Ginny when she says, "Price surveys are addicting!" So, you can guess that when we received the call from a volunteer eager to conduct a survey in St. Joseph, Mo., we were happy to join forces. Be on the lookout for the St. Joseph survey on our website later this year.

Are you interested in achieving a funeral price survey of your area? Consider volunteering with us! You can reach us via email, fca.gkc@gmail.com, or phone, 816-561-6322. □

Annual, from page 1

without which they may die or have a severely impaired quality of life.

How do people donate?

The how-tos of donation may seem intimidating, but the panelists stressed that the body donation programs and the transplant network have experienced, compassionate staff who will walk you and your loved ones through every step. The willed-body programs of KUMC and KCUMB are similar, with the exception that KU's program represents the entire state of Kansas, while KCUMB's program is governed by the Missouri Anatomical Board and represents the western part of Missouri. □

For more information, visit www.funeralskc.org and look for the Fall 2014 issue of our newsletter. Click on "News," then "Newsletters," then "Fall 2014." The lead article on page 1, continuing on page 10, provides institutional contact information.

And consider attending the FCA-GKC's next meeting, in fall 2019.

Veterans' burial benefits



All eligible veterans are entitled to burial in a national cemetery, with no charge for the gravesite, headstone, vault, and interment. The family is responsible for all other charges.

The Veterans Administration makes additional burial allowance payments in cases of death during active duty, from service-related injuries, in a VA facility, or when the veteran was receiving a VA pension or disability.

Veterans' spouses and dependents are also entitled to some burial benefits.

See the brochure "Veterans' Funeral and Burial Benefits" at funerals.org for more information. □

Overhead costs, price differentials, consumer choice: ‘Hiding’ or good business?

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Board Member



These cremation providers, offering discounted services, are affiliated with full-service funeral homes that offer the same service at much higher prices. Consumers may not be aware of the connection, so attentiveness to our Funeral Price Survey is an important consumer protection strategy.

Last fall FCA-GKC received a letter from a local resident who was quite put out with us for not “exposing” three locally owned funeral homes in Johnson County—Porter Funeral Home & Crematory, Amos Family Funeral Home & Crematory, and Penwell-Gable Funeral Home & Crematory—for “ripping off” consumers who obtain their cremation services. The letter writer, named Clay, had done some research and accurately found that the three mortuaries own and operate storefront cremation businesses with different names than their parent companies.

The problem, as the writer saw it, is that the cremation prices charged at the storefronts are significantly lower than the prices for the same service at the funeral homes. Further, he pointed out, the storefront-sold cremations take place at the parent companies’ crematories and the services are the same for both. Yet families arranging for cremations at the funeral homes are not informed of their option to obtain cremations at the storefronts at much-reduced prices.

Clay wrote, “Why on God’s green earth would I ever use one of their funeral homes when I can use their ‘hidden’ cremation places and pay one-third of what I would if I went to their funeral home? The service they provide is exactly the same, but they never told me when I went to their funeral homes that they offered the same service at their discount places.”

“Why haven’t you reported that? You are supposed to be protecting the public, when in fact these locally owned funeral homes are ripping off families who choose their funeral home for cremation and don’t know they own a discount cremation place. This is a crime in my book. ... Why are you protecting the locally owned funeral homes?”

We addressed this issue in our Fall 2014 newsletter, available on our website, www.funeralskc.org, in a story headlined “Today’s cremation options: Fire, water, digital.” That was nearly five years ago. It’s time to look into it again.

Definition of a direct cremation

Direct cremation is the least costly method of body disposal. It involves transportation of the body, placement

in a container of fiberboard or cardboard, cremation, and returning the ashes to the family. No embalming, visitation, or services are involved.

The following are the direct-cremation prices quoted on the general price lists of the three funeral homes and their subsidiaries, as compiled in the FCA-GKC’s biannual price survey last year:

<u>Establishment</u>	<u>Price for direct cremation</u>
Amos Family Funeral Home & Crematory	\$2,675
Cremation Center of Kansas City	\$995
www.cremationcenterkc.com	\$775

Amos owns and operates the Cremation Center of Kansas City, which offers an additional discount for consumers who arrange for cremation online at the listed website. Three prices, the same service, all performed at the Amos crematory.

<u>Establishment</u>	<u>Price for direct cremation</u>
Penwell-Gabel Funeral Home & Crematory	\$3,145
Ara Cremation	\$1,080

Penwell-Gabel owns Ara. Two prices, the same service, both performed at the Penwell crematory.

<u>Establishment</u>	<u>Price for direct cremation</u>
Porter Funeral Home & Crematory	\$2,197
Cremation Society of Kansas & Missouri	\$1,195
www.midstatescremation.com	\$695

Porter owns the Cremation Society of Kansas & Missouri, which offers an additional discount for those who arrange for direct cremations online at the listed website. Three prices, the same service, all performed at the Porter crematory.

Clay concluded his letter by saying, “Well, I certainly didn’t use any of those places for my arrangements.” He stressed that he does not spend his money with “dishonest” places.

See Price Differentials, page 6

The big picture

By Ginny Farney
FCA-GKC President



I became acquainted with the FCA-GKC 10 years ago, when volunteer and past president Sally King gave an educational presentation for the hospice company I work with, and I was fascinated. I didn't know that I knew so little about funerals. Becoming an FCA volunteer went to the top of my "Someday" list that day.

I routinely use the organization's price survey as a resource, seeing people's eyes pop open as they take in the information available. It provides relief, a starting point to move forward in making the dreaded plans.

Working with those facing the end of life, I see people every day who, like me, have no clue how little they know about planning a funeral. They have never really thought about it or talked about it. They figure the funeral home down the street is "as good as any." Some believe they are not going to die—but most of us do eventually. It is heart wrenching, when someone dies suddenly, to watch the grieving family scramble to reach a consensus on which funeral home to call. If only they had had these conversations sooner.

My "Someday" came in fall 2016, when I attended an FCA-GKC board meeting. There is more laughter (and wine) than you would expect from people discussing such grave matters. I kept attending, became involved in projects, and was invited to join the board in February 2017. I participated in my first funeral home price survey last fall. I found it strangely addicting: all the details, the tracking and channeling information back and forth. Our survey committee operated efficiently, and this inspired me. Accepting the nomination for president required no thought at all. In fact, my mind was filled with ideas for growing and expanding our value and influence in greater Kansas City, Topeka, northeast Kansas, northwest Missouri, and beyond.

In spite of all my plans to move full-speed-ahead, life happened. The board was shaken by member Lyle Van Vleet's sudden passing, which leaves a big hole in our organization. His unexpected loss reminds us of the importance of planning and the value of the education and resources the FCA-GKC provides.

We have completed our Topeka Area Funeral Home Price Survey! I thank our volunteer Greta Trimble for her hard work. Another word of thanks to our volunteer Jon, because his passionate plea for a survey in the St. Joseph area and his willingness to do the ground work prompted the creation of our northwest Missouri survey.

Volunteers are vital to our organization. If you have ever thought about volunteering, this may be your "Someday." Contact us, attend a board meeting, and consider where you can lend a hand. You are not required to attend monthly board meetings, and most volunteer tasks can be completed from home on your own time.

When death takes one of our own

By Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Board Member

Seven-year FCA-GKC board member Lyle Van Vleet was with us on Jan. 16 and gone on Jan. 17. A pulmonary embolism claimed him. No drawn-out battles with cancer or other painful diseases. Not a bad way to go in that regard. He was 76.

We talk about the practicalities of death all the time at FCA-GKC: how to prepare for it, what to avoid, and what to do. Still, we are not prepared when it happens so abruptly. His absence is still sinking in.

My wife, Marcia, and I met Lyle and his wife, Marian, in the 1970s as members of Good Shepherd Catholic Church in Shawnee. The following is from my remarks at his funeral at Good Shepherd.

• • •

I'm Steve Nicely, and I'm going to miss my compadre of volunteerism, Lyle. It started about 25 years ago when I was a *Kansas City Star* journalist in my home town of Kansas City, Kan.—known then for its pockets of poverty, crime, and ethnic diversity. After work I would come home to Shawnee and to Good Shepherd, which were characterized by their lack of poverty, crime, and diversity.



Some of us at church wanted to help, to reach across the county line. We formed a group, KCK Connection, and started volunteering. The main organization we connected with was Friends of Yates, which operates a shelter for abused women and children. Lyle and Marian grew close to people at Yates.

Next came the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City, and Lyle joined me on the board. Our major project every two years is a survey of over 1,000 prices charged by 114 funeral providers in our metro area. It's a massive project, and Lyle's facility with numbers and spreadsheets was a major part of it. Changing one number can change several calculations. Only Marian knows how much work that was for him, but he never complained. I'd say, "Can you make one more change?" He'd say, "I'm here to serve."

See Lyle, page 5

Our goal to expand our reach and share our mission with a larger audience also depends on financial support. Your tax-deductible donation will be used directly toward these efforts. We welcome your questions, stories, suggestions, and feedback to guide us in serving our community. We thank you. □

Lyle, from page 4



Lyle Van Vleet, longtime FCA-GKC board member, died unexpectedly. He had wanted a natural burial, and his family was able to fulfill that wish at Highland Cemetery of Prairie Village.

Next came the Highland Cemetery of Prairie Village. For years, our FCA board could not find a single cemetery in this metropolitan area that would allow natural burial—without embalming, in a biodegradable container, without a concrete grave liner. Then we ran across the 150-year-old Highland Cemetery in the middle of Prairie Village. All of Highland's burials in the 1860s were natural, and it still had space available. "It's yours if you want it," said the cemetery's longtime guardian, Asher Langworthy. Lyle and I and two others formed a nonprofit corporation and took over management three years ago. Lyle was in charge of maintenance and marking the exact locations of graves for burials. He wanted a natural burial. Today he's going to get one.

I once asked him in the car on our way to yet another meeting, "Do you sometimes regret being drawn into all these projects?" He said, "No. It wasn't anything I didn't want to do."

"I'm here to serve." I know I speak for many of you today in saying, Thank you, Lyle. The world is a much better place because of you. It's been a pleasure serving with you. We love you and will miss you. □

Dead bodies and disease: The 'danger' that doesn't exist

From the National Funeral Consumers Alliance

Funeral industry members frequently claim that dead bodies are a source of contagion to the public and that embalming is necessary to prevent the spread of disease. Some also claim that unembalmed dead bodies must be buried in a casket and a vault to prevent "contamination" of groundwater. These assertions are not true.

The myth of contagion from dead bodies is one of the most persistent myths of the American funeral industry, and it's important for consumers to know that there is no evidence, peer-reviewed or otherwise, to justify it. In fact, there is overwhelming scientific evidence *against* it.

It's important to remember that this is not a matter of opinion, but of fact. We often see articles that read like this: "John Q. Funeral Director says embalming helps prevent the spread of disease, but consumer advocates say this isn't so."

This is not an accurate way to present the issue. It's not just that consumer advocates "say it isn't so." The Centers for Disease Control, the World Health Organization, and the Pan-American Health Organization have all published data backing up the Funeral Consumers Alliance position.

By contrast, there are *no* studies showing a public health threat from unembalmed bodies. There is no evidence of rampant disease in the countries around the world (almost all of them) where embalming is seldom, if ever, practiced. In addition, we've never seen one instance in which a funeral industry member provided any evidence to support the claim that unembalmed corpses pose a health threat. The Funeral Consumers Alliance, however, supports its position with scientific, peer-reviewed evidence.

The next time a funeral industry member claims that dead bodies are dangerous, ask for evidence and documentation. □

This newsletter, past newsletter archives, and a treasure trove of information about funeral options are all available on our new website:



www.funeralskc.org

Price Differentials, from page 5

"I also found while doing my research that there are a handful of cremation places that are locally owned and not associated with any other funeral homes," he wrote. "They offer the same low price to every family they serve. And that is the way it should be. Shame on you for not letting the public know this."

What is the reason these three funeral homes charge different prices for the same service at their crematories? We asked each of them to comment for this article.

Amos Family Funeral Home response

Amos Family Funeral Home & Crematory has served Johnson County/Kansas City Metro Area for over 72 years and has been family owned for four generations. We have always prided ourselves in our honesty and integrity. We have never tried to cover up that Amos Family Funeral Home & Crematory owns Cremation Center of Kansas City, and have made the distinctions between the two very clear.

—Parker Amos, Amos Family Funeral Home & Crematory,
10901 Johnson Drive, Shawnee

Porter Funeral Home response

Yes, I do own the Porter Funeral Home, the Cremation Society of Kansas & Missouri, and Mid-States Cremation. Each of these are individual companies and are registered with the Kansas Secretary of State and the Kansas State Board of Mortuary Arts. As far as our pricing, each location's pricing is based on the costs and overhead of their respective business and the level of services they provide. The Porter Funeral Home sits on almost three acres, has a 10,000-square-foot building with 80 parking places, and has eight fulltime employees, where the Cremation Society office on Roe Avenue is a 700-square-foot office with one fulltime employee. Mid-States Cremation is even more different in that it is an online-only provider of cremation services with no face-to-face interaction with those choosing this service. I hope this puts into perspective for your letter writer as to why there are different prices for three very different businesses with three very different levels of service.

—Rick Wiseman, Owner Operator, Porter Funeral Home,
8535 Monrovia, Lenexa

Penwell-Gabel Funeral Home response

Thank you for the opportunity to address this matter. It is always useful for us to hear constructive feedback so we can better serve our community. At Penwell-Gabel and Ara, it is our goal to serve a diverse client base. Each of our brands offer a different level of service, which is reflected in our pricing models. At Penwell-Gabel and Ara we clearly disclose our services and pricing on our websites, allowing families to make the decisions that are best for them.

Penwell-Gabel is a full-service funeral home, offering families multiple options for celebrating their loved one's life. Accommodating both a small and large number of visitors, receptions, memorial ceremonies, and funerals followed by cremation, are feasible at any size. For families

who choose direct cremation, Ara provides a non-traditional, modest setting, requiring minimal overhead, which gives our consumers an alternate choice in their selection. Because of the distinct differences within our facilities, we are able to offer flexible pricing.

—Christopher Holland, Managing Funeral Director,
Penwell-Gabel Funeral Home, 14275 Blackbob Road, Olathe

Conclusion

We emailed a follow-up question to the three funeral home operators, as follows:

"Clay's key complaint is wrapped up in the question: When families come to your funeral home to arrange a direct cremation, are they made aware of the discounted services offered at your storefront locations?

Christopher Holland, at Penwell-Gabel, emailed back saying, "We feel the response we already provided explains our position on this matter." The other two have not responded. From that, it might be concluded that Clay's complaint is a valid one and that families are not advised of the discounted services available at subsidiary storefronts.

If so, the practice may seem misleading, but *it is not illegal*. The difference in direct-cremation prices between a funeral home and a storefront largely is wrapped up in a "basic services" fee that the Federal Trade Commission's Funeral Rule permits funeral homes to charge. The fee covers the cost of overhead expenses and staffing. The storefronts have much lower overhead.

Should a funeral operator send a direct-cremation family to its discount storefront, and thus forego the extra revenue needed to operate the funeral home's facilities? It seems to boil down to this: Let the buyer beware. Better yet, let all consumers be aware of FCA-GKC's survey of funeral prices containing all of the prices charged by all funeral and cremation providers in this metropolitan area and surrounding region. They are posted on our website, www.funeralskc.org, available free of charge. □

Preplan, but don't prepay

Funeral homes like to see families arriving ahead of time to plan funerals, and FCA does, too. But the funeral home will try to sell a prepaid plan, and we advise against it. Preplan, we say, but don't prepay.

Prepaid contracts can be restrictive and can make you vulnerable. What if you move? What if you change your mind? What if the funeral home is sold or goes out of business? What if you can't make the payments? What if someone raids your account? All those things have happened in our community.

We suggest opening a bank or credit union savings account jointly with a trusted friend or relative who knows your wishes. □

Meet our new officers

By Kate Sargent and Steve Nicely, FCA-GKC Board Members

FCA-GKC began the year with the election of two new officers. Ginny Farney took over as president, replacing Frank Cockrell, and Jacque Amweg was elected secretary, replacing Steve Nicely. Cockrell continues as a volunteer and Nicely continues as an FCA-GKC board member. Both women bring a wealth of experience to their new leadership roles.

Ginny Farney

Farney, of Prairie Village, has a 37-year career as a registered nurse, including the last 12 years as a Certified Hospice and Palliative Care Nurse. She estimates she has witnessed more than 300 deaths in her nursing career, and said those experiences profoundly changed her attitude toward death and life.

She is a massage therapist, Certified Spiritual Healer, and practices several energy healing modalities, including Reiki. She has a strong interest in the ancient spiritual practices of indigenous peoples, focusing on the Pachakuti Mesa Tradition, a practice adapted from Peruvian shamanic traditions.

"All these alternative healing practices can be used to ease anxiety, pain, and suffering, throughout life and particularly at end of life," she said.

She is a Certified Death Midwife, an End-of-Life Transition Guide, a Home Funeral Guide, and a Grief Companion. She works part time as a hospice nurse.

"It is my life's calling to ease the fear and misconception around death and dying," she said.

She sees death as natural and often beautiful, adding, "I think death simply is closing our eyes in one dimension and opening them in another." She terms it as "birthing souls into a new life, a transformation that is just as energy-charged as the birth of a baby."

A century ago, people died at home with family, she says. By age 10, children had witnessed death and were not frightened by it. Isolating death in today's culture renders it remote and scary.

Gratitude for our donors

With great gratitude, we recognize those who have supported us with donations during the past six months for a total of \$7,750. The largest donation came in the form of a grant from the Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth for \$5,000. The sisters wanted to support our mission of funeral-option education for consumers, especially those who can least afford expensive funerals.

A woman at the Keeler Women's Center, where an FCA-GKC board member conducted a presentation, was an example. She took in a homeless man and cared for him during the last months of his life. When he died, she wiped out her savings of \$7,000 for his funeral and burial, then learned that she could have accomplished the same thing for less than half the amount or arranged a cremation for less than \$1,000. She and others present were glad to have the information.



Ginny Farney (left), president, and Jacque Amweg, secretary.

Jacque Amweg

Amweg explores this American cultural shift in her article on the back page about death denial. She is a social worker who brings more than 20 years of hospice experience in Nebraska, Colorado, and now Kansas City. Her wide experience includes direct patient care, bereavement coordination, and grief support.

She also speaks of death in terms of a birthing. Her first exposure to hospice work was as a social work intern at a hospital. She found hospice "was such a beautiful place to be."

"With hospice, the end of life is treated in a similar way to life's beginning, with attentive normalization and care," she said.

Amweg, of Independence, Mo., is a grief counselor at Kansas City Hospice. Her professional credentials include a degree in social work from the University of Nebraska-Kearney and a graduate degree in social work from the University of Nebraska-Omaha. She holds Thanatology Certification with the Association for Death Education and Counseling. Thanatology is the scientific study of death and the practices associated with it, including the study of the needs of the terminally ill and their families.

"I was immediately interested in FCA when I heard about it," she said. "[The end of life] is such a fragile time for people and I wanted to be part of protecting the rights of consumers to choose."

Amweg said her work gives her an understanding of how fragile life can be, and how precious.

"Being around death and dying is life affirming," she said. "Spiritual practices are enhanced by that." □



Thank you! FCA-GKC Board of Directors

Don & Janet Baken	Ray & Kay Howa
Howard Baldwin	James & Virginia Kenney
Carol & Gary Bloomer	Andrew & Annella Kuhar
Marilyn Blunk	Rudena Mallory
Susan & James Brown	F.W. & D.J. Neff
G. Frank Cockrell	Steve & Marcia Nicely
Carol Fields	Virginia Powers
James & Patricia Fitzpatrick	D.D. & N.E. Puett
Roy & Peggy Flatt	Allen & Margaret Ramsey
James & Janice Grebe	Sisters of Charity of Leavenworth
John Griffith	David West
Janet & Forest Hanna	Thomas Woodbury
J. Holdeman	Doris Yonker

**Funeral Consumers Alliance
of Greater Kansas City**
PO Box 7021
Kansas City, MO 64113



816-561-6322
fca.gkc@gmail.com
www.funeralskc.org

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
KANSAS CITY, MO
PERMIT NO. 2826

RETURN SERVICE
REQUESTED

FCA-GKC Board of Directors

Officers

President: Ginny Farney
Vice President: Pam Thomas, PhD
Secretary: Jacque Amweg
Treasurer: David Johnson

Members

Kathleen Foster
Steve Nicely
Nancy Petersen
Kate Sargent

Our culture's denial of death

By Jacque Amweg, LSCSW, LCSW, FCA-GKC Secretary

We at the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Greater Kansas City have experienced many times that people don't seem to want to talk about death or even think about it.

We come by this psychological denial of death naturally in our culture, this tendency to think that death is not real, not here, or can be reversed. In some ways, we tend to gloss over the realities of death and keep death at a distance. It has not always been this way.

Sick and dying people were cared for at home by their families until the 19th century. The whole multi-generational family was involved in the experience and children were not "protected" from the process. Mourners were known and supported, which normalized the attitude that death is a part of life.

As hospitalization became more common, death became more institutionalized and the sick and dying went to hospitals. Families were removed from the process of caring for the sick throughout their dying and death. When an ill family member could go to the hospital and stay for extended periods, there was less connection with the dying person and the process. Imagine the difference between hearing a *story* about the decline and death of a loved one and being at the *bedside*, holding the person, and experiencing the story as it unfolds.

Today's young or middle-aged adults may have their first experience of a family death or illness without having been involved before in caring for a sick person or planning a funeral. This separation tends to increase anxiety and fear about the end of life.

In surreal ways, we allow ourselves to be confronted with death and have seen deaths occur in television, movies, and video games our whole lives. That can skew our understanding of medical treatment and the truth of loss.



Most older people have experienced illness, death, and other losses. There may even be multiple losses over a lifetime. In general, elders are less fearful of dying than the young. However, life transitions or traumatic events may bring the reality of death closer to home, which can increase fear.

Older people who are coping with life-threatening illness have specific needs, including maintaining a sense of self, participating in decisions about their lives, being reassured that their lives have value, and obtaining adequate health care.* Their loved ones can reach out to experienced professionals who can guide them in providing those needs.

During the past 35 years, the trend has been toward home care again, and now we have the option of hospice care at home or at a hospice facility, as well as people who will provide guidance with home funerals. There are hopeful signs that we may continue to grow toward a less fearful approach to death. □

*Cook, A.S., & Oltjenbruns, K.A. (1998). *Dying and grieving: Lifespan and family perspectives* (2nd Ed.). Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace.

Jacque Amweg is a grief counselor at Kansas City Hospice.