

A scenic landscape featuring a valley with a winding road, surrounded by lush green hills and mountains in the background. A small town with colorful buildings is visible on the right side of the image. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds.

# **Transforming the End of Life: Lessons from around the World**

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**4<sup>th</sup> Annual Palliative Care Conference**  
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**I have no conflicts of interest. Some  
photos thanks to Google images**

# The Blue Zones



- Moderate, regular physical activity as part of daily life
- Plant-based diet
- Moderate calorie intake
- Life purpose
- Engagement in family life
- Engagement in social life
- Stress reduction
- Moderate alcohol consumption, especially wine
- Engagement in spirituality or religion

# Mediterranean Diet

- Fresh fruits and vegetables- at least 5 colors daily
- Whole grains, legumes
- Fish and occasional chicken breast
- Healthy fats such as olive oil, avocados, nuts (almonds and walnuts best), seeds (sunflower, flax, etc)
- Almost no red meat, dairy fat (low fat Greek yogurt OK), sugar
- One glass of wine daily MAX



# Mediterranean diet and palliative care

- Concept of HORMESIS
  - life exists in harsh environments, and that organisms have developed complex mechanisms to cope with environmental stressors
- Proven health benefits to reduce cardiovascular, cerebrovascular, cancer deaths; reduce development of dementia
- Newer studies:
  - **Reduce the risk of new-onset frailty by 70%**
  - Reduce pain and increase quality of life for those with osteoarthritis
  - Increase psychological resilience

# Nuoro Province Blue Zone

- Purpose
- Engagement
- Movement





## Okinawa Blue Zone

- Low calorie, plant based diet high in soy, turmeric, ginger
- Everyone gardens!
- Moai: Lifelong circle of friends that supports people into old age
- Ikigai: Strong sense of purpose gets them up every morning
- Tatami mats ensure old people can get up and down from the ground



**Okinawans say:** “Don’t worry. Take care of yourself. Eat your vegetables, have a positive outlook, be kind to people, and smile”

“Centenarians tend to be decisive. They know what they want and then stay on course. But when life circumstances force them to adapt, they become flexible thinkers, able to embrace the change. And they are likeable.”



*Hara Hachi bu:  
Eat until you are 80% full*

# Japanese Health Care System

- Patients see a doctor about 15 times yearly- all visits limited to 15 minutes
- Health care paid for by the state, everyone age 6-70 has a 30% co-pay. Below and above that the co-pay is 10%.
- 27% of the population is over 65. There is a national holiday called Respect for the Aged
- Everyone age 40 and up pays into the home care program- a tax of about \$30/mo. Once you qualify, you get an MD visit every 2 weeks, a PT visit weekly, and a home aid visit twice daily
- BUT- Hospice is very rare, and for cancer only



# Sweden- best place in the world to grow old (not a blue zone)

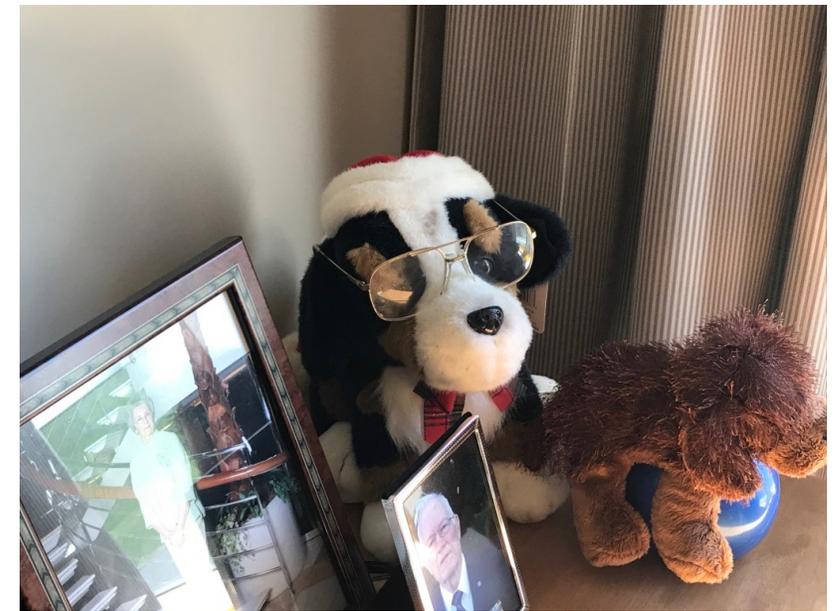
- Life expectancy 79.9 for men and 83.7 for women (second only to Japan).
- **Health has improved in the older population over the last few decades, so care needs have decreased overall.**
- 94% of people over 65 live at home, receive in home assistance when needed. 4% of all care (health care or home care) is paid for by the elders themselves.
- Special municipal “fixers” who come in and hang curtains or change lightbulbs (and other similar chores) to help reduce falls in older adults.



## Dementia care in Nova Scotia- Parkland at the Lakes

- Specialized staff and lots of unique touches (swimming pool!)
- Toilet seats are black to be seen against the white of the toilet and the floor
- Walls are “tactile”- boasting woven artwork and other gems that allow residents to find pleasure in touching them
- Team members are trained to provide all of the care- you may catch a nurse cooking dinner or an aide doing basic wound care. Everyone works together and it was clear that they all enjoy what they are doing
- The residents are always busy with exercise, stories, or other daily activities, and all were friendly and smiling- even those whose dementia was advanced enough that they couldn't really converse any longer.
- Clowns (from the children's hospital) come to work with residents!
- Their motto is to keep it simple- provide comfort and gentle touch.

Richard was kind enough to show me his apartment- and proudly showed me photos of his wife 3 times in a row.



# How does all this fit into hospice and palliative care?

- Symptom management through Blue Zone adoption
- Bring Blue Zone elements into your organization
- Think about ways policy changes can improve end-of-life care



# Blue Zone factors for symptoms management



- Mediterranean diet- decrease pain, improve function
- Maintain purpose
- Who is in your Maoui?
- Move- even if it is just to clap your hands when you sing
- Drink wine!
- Be spiritual

# Make your organization a Blue Zones Project Approved™ Worksite

- Increase longevity through permanent changes to environment, policy, and social networks that lower healthcare costs and improve quality of life
- Develop a comprehensive wellness program for employees and volunteers, and promote healthy choices on the work campus

*“I believe that Avow is the first hospice and palliative care organization in the United States to become a Blue Zones Project Approved Worksite. By caring for yourselves, you will be able to better care for others, and for longer.”*

*-Avow Hospice and Palliative Care, FL*

# What can we do to influence policy?



**The Palliative Care & Hospice  
Education & Training Act  
S.693/HR 1676**

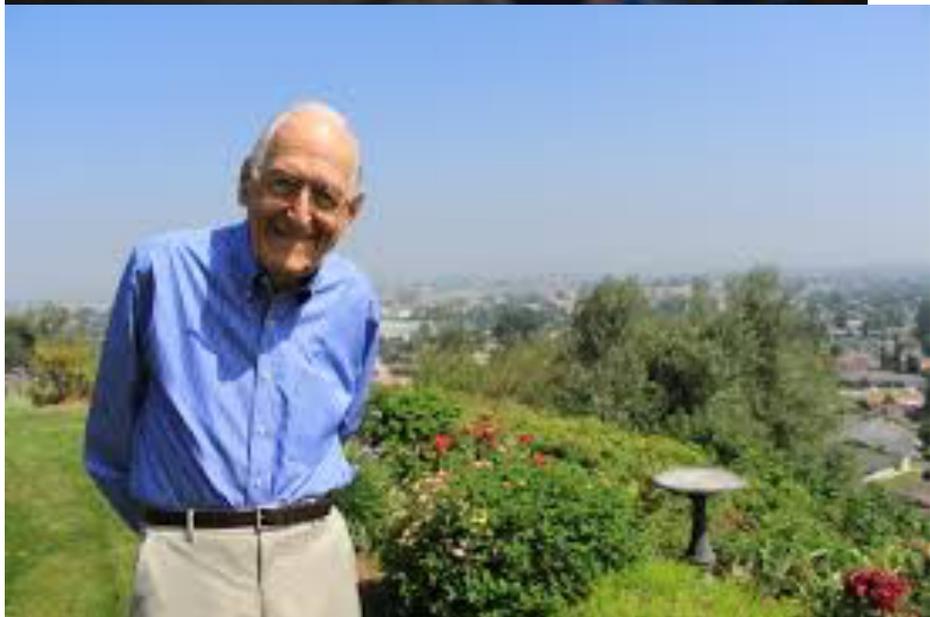


We need more  
medical professionals  
trained in hospice &  
palliative care to  
guarantee access to  
care for all  
Americans!

**#PCHETA**

- Vote!
- Tell success stories
- Study what we do so we can expand the evidence base in palliative care
- Educate students, residents, practicing physicians and all health care professionals

*Did you know that 19% of all hospice patients now have dementia as their primary diagnosis?*



End-of-life care starts now- for us and the patients we care for

- Make movement a habit
- Follow the Mediterranean diet
- Stop eating when you are 80% full
- Form your Moai
- Make end-of-life intergenerational
- Find meaning
- Be spiritual
- Keep learning!