

THE JEWISH CHRONICLE

'The Last Chapter' looks at hospice care

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WQED-TV will air "The Last Chapter" Thursday, June 30, at 7:30 p.m. (Courtesy WQED-TV)

"The Last Chapter," a one-hour documentary exploring many of the medical, legal, cultural, spiritual and ethical issues concerning end-of-life care, will be presented by the Jewish Healthcare Foundation and WQED-TV on Thursday, June 30, at 7:30 p.m.

The documentary is JHF's latest effort to advance its "Closure" initiative, aiming to help educate people in planning and changing expectations for end-of-life.

The documentary takes the viewer inside the hospitals, homes and lives of palliative and hospice care recipients and providers.

"We are trying to give members of the community personal stories about how various families plan for end of life, and encourage others to not wait until they are in a crisis situation," said Nancy Zionts, chief program officer for JHF. "Preparation goes a long way to help people reach closure."

The lives followed are not all senior citizens, but include people living with chronic illnesses, and a mother in her 40s trying to make plans for her family.

"These families were given the 'blessing' of time, and the ability to plan," Zionts said. "Many of

us put off these conversations until we are in a crisis situation, when we may make more emotional and less thoughtful decisions.”

The film is not a “medical documentary,” Zionts added, but rather very “personal and family-centered.”

The documentary was a learning experience for its creators, as well.

“When I began this project, I had only the rudimentary knowledge that most people have about hospice,” said writer and senior WQED producer Alicia Schisler. “[I thought] it was a place where you go to pass away. But I found out that most hospice care takes place in someone’s home. Most people do want to pass away in their homes, but most don’t. People often don’t know they have options. They’re not sure what questions to ask.”

“We see this as an issue that will touch every one of us,” she said. “How we prepare for these issues makes a difference with the healing of the family. The film is about people and support, and how we look at the issues of dying, and of the legacy that people want to leave behind.”

The documentary will be preceded by a live panel discussion featuring experts ranging from medical personnel to spiritual personnel to community members, Zionts said. They will discuss why it is important to talk to family members about end-of-life issues. Experts will be available to answer questions by phone after the conclusion of the film.

“We want people who are dying to have the last word, and to have their wishes honored,” said Zionts.

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