*Adapted from “A Dying Exercise for Volunteer Orientation” by Monica K. Ebberts, Hospice Specialists of Salt Lake City and based on “A Grief and Bereavement Exercise for Small Groups” by Reverend Ronald R. Peak and Reverend James C. Wooldridge, the Hospice of Marin model and a revision by Hospice, Inc. of Larimer County and Utah Heritage Hospice*

**Preparation:**

[Create warm atmosphere with minimal distraction; put everything away except a pen/pencil. Have tissues available. Provide 8 slips of paper/person.]

**Instructions:**

The exercise is a chance for you to examine your own personal feelings on illness and dying. This is a personal exercise and your responses will not be shared. This is a quiet exercise that will require you to consider your own feelings and thoughts.

You will write one thing that you value on each of the eight slips of paper in front of you:

1. On the first two slips of paper, write down two things you own that are very, very important to you (e.g., a journal, your home, your car, a piece of jewelry, a family heirloom).
2. On the next two slips of paper, write down two activities that are very important to you (e.g., working, hiking, reading, swimming).
3. On the next two slips of paper, write down two goals or aspirations, things that you’d like to accomplish in the future (e.g., getting a promotion, building a new house, having grandchildren, writing a book).
4. On the last two slips of paper, write down the names of two individuals who are very important to you, one person per slip of paper (not the word “family”); you may include living or deceased people, or pets.

Place all of your sheets of paper in front of you so you can see all of them at one time; think about the importance of these in your life and the joy they bring you. [Pause 10 sec]

**Narrative/Story:**

I’m going to tell you a story. This is a story about you. Consider what you would be feeling and thinking about as these events happen to you.

It’s a warm summer day and you’re feeling good about life. You decide to take a shower before heading off to bed. As you are drying yourself off, you notice a lump where one should not be. It is small and painful. Fear strikes you deep. You brush it off, thinking that you’re just imagining it to be something it’s not. You find you cannot sleep much tonight.

The fear about this lump begins to affect other areas of your life; you feel anxious and worried. You call the doctor for an appointment. The process has begun – it’s time for you to give away something in your life. **Please choose a slip of paper, crumple it up and toss it to the center of the table now.** [Pause briefly until all have tossed a paper to the center of the table.]

For the next several days you worry and then you find yourself in the doctor’s waiting room. You notice everything in the room: the ticking clock, the receptionist clicking her pen, and the worn out magazines. You’re feeling anxious. You tell yourself that you’re making a big deal about nothing. Your name is called and you jump a little. Your heart is beating faster now as the doctor takes a history and you try to second-guess why he is asking all of those questions about malignancy in your family history. As these things run through your mind, you feel afraid. **Give away another slip of paper.** “We’ll know more by Friday,” says the doctor, “I’ll call you.”

You get into your car and drive the few miles home. It’s two more days until Friday. You try to keep your mind off of what might happen, but no matter how you try to distract yourself, you keep coming back to the lump. It’s only Wednesday night, and time is dragging on slowly. You think a lot about, “What if?” Life is *really* precious . . . your family means so much . . . **Please give away another slip of paper.**

Friday is finally here. You didn’t sleep well last night. You tell yourself it’s nothing, but you are really worried. The phone rings. It is the nurse at the doctor’s office. “Could you come in at about 3:30?” she asks, “The doctor wants to speak with you.” Fear strikes you deeper this time. You prepare yourself to go into the doctor’s office. **Please give away another slip of paper.**

As you walk to the doctor’s office, your heart beats faster and your legs feel like rubber. The doctor sits in a chair next to you and the words you have dreaded are spoken: “I’m afraid I have some bad news.” You can’t remember all that the doctor says in the next few minutes, but the words “surgery,” “radiation,” and “chemotherapy” stand out. You thought you could take this bad news. But now fear, anxiety, loss, grief and loneliness all have new meaning. **Please give away another slip of paper.**

Two months go by; you’ve had surgery and started chemotherapy. The friends that were so supportive at the time of your operation are strangely silent now; you have lost weight and you cry more now. Your life seems to be slipping away; you have lost a lot of energy; activities you used to enjoy have lost their pleasure. You have changed. Life has changed. **Please give away another slip of paper.**

Several months pass and you know that you’re not getting any better –all treatments stopped today. You are confined to bed most of the time. Your family and friends come more often now and it begins to dawn on you that the end, your death, is in sight. Life seems to be spinning out of control. **Please give away another slip of paper.**

You wake up early one morning not even sure whether it’s morning or night. Your breathing has become more labored, more difficult. You somehow sense that this may be your last day. . . you slip into a deep sleep . . . you take a long, deep breath . . . holding it in, and then letting it go. Take another deep breath, hold it in, and let it go. This was your last breath. You have died. **Please give away your last remaining piece of paper.**

[Pause]

Remember to breathe. With each new breath sense your energy, your health. You are alive and well. You are whole and you can return to the world of living things and living people.

This exercise is over. Think about the things that were truly important to you that you held onto the longest.

[Ask the group to share what they noticed during the exercise, especially how it impacted their thoughts about their patients and their role as a clinician.]