

VICTORIA HOSPICE

The dinner table is the most forgiving place for difficult conversations. This was the belief that shaped Death Over Dinner, an international campaign aimed to facilitate conversations about death and dying in 2013. Since its initiation, there have been over a hundred thousand Death Over Dinner hosted around the globe, and on March 25, 2021, Victoria Hospice hosted its very own Death Over Dinner for the Greater Victoria community.

Talking about death and dying may seem like one of the more challenging conversations people can have, but Death Over Dinner provided a unique opportunity to address the basic human fact that we are all, at some point, going to die. In Western Canada, when asked, most people have indicated that they would prefer to die at home in the presence of loved ones, yet almost 70% of Canadian deaths occur in a hospital according to the Canadian Hospice Palliative Care Association. How we end our lives is the most important and costly conversation Canadians are *not* having. A conversation among loved ones, friends, and even strangers could begin to change these numbers, and bring the conversation about death back into the community. As we build greater comfort and literacy around this important topic, every single one of us wins.

Ideally, a Death Over Dinner event takes place in person with each participant sharing the same meal to foster social connection and genuine conversations. During these challenging times, we had the unique obstacle of organizing a dinner virtually over Zoom. Yet even through Zoom, both crying and laughter were had, and intentional connection was achieved. Victoria Hospice's Death over Dinner event was enjoyed by seven participants and three facilitators. The group ranged from retirees to young adults all having some thread of connection that fostered meaningful dialogue: in one way or another, we had all been touched by death.

Discussion over dinner allowed us to cover a range of topics, including advance care planning, grief, spirituality, and culture. In our time together we exchanged views on how to reclaim death conversation into the community, balancing hope and joy with sadness and suffering, as well as a number of other important end of life topics.

One participant, Wally Lazaruk shared "The event provided an opportunity for participants to talk about their experiences, feelings, thoughts, wishes and understandings about this significant and inevitable part of life called death. These conversations help us to accept death as a normal part of life, a natural rite of passage, and to commit to live as fully as we can and focus on what is essential and important in the present moment."

Victoria Hospice plans to host another Death Over Dinner event, check back at <https://victoriahospice.org/public-education/> for further details.