

## Podcast 339 Tarashanti Transcript

Karen Wyatt: Hello everyone and welcome to End of Life University podcast where we share real talk about life and death. I'm your host as always, Dr Karen Wyatt and I want to thank you for joining me here for episode number 339 in just a moment. I'll be sharing with you a very interesting interview I did with Char Tarashanti about Feng Shui for hospice patients. Where we talk all about how the physical surroundings in the room of a hospice patient can make a big difference in their well being and things we should pay attention to and small changes that we might be able to make in those surroundings. So I found it very interesting. I learned a ton from this interview, so I'm hoping you will find it helpful and interesting as well. But first I just want to say a big thank you to my newest supporters on my patreon page and this is the page where people can come who want to support this podcast for a small donation on a monthly basis or an annual basis as small as \$2 a month, actually. and in exchange receive some bonuses from me and this week I'm thanking my newest patrons Abby Fy and Anne Janssen, thank you so much. And then also Richard Schneider and who has already been a patron but increased his pledge. So I just want to thank all three of you so much for your support. It means everything to me. And also I'll share with you. I got an email message this week from Marian who writes about the Ask Dr Death episode that aired last week. And Marian wrote, I happened to listen to this podcast on the 13th anniversary of my husband's suicide and found it very helpful as I have found the greatest majority of your podcasts. Please keep up this great work. You have helped so many of us in so many ways and Marian, thank you. I just wanted to express that positive feedback like that is really helpful to me and I appreciate it so much. Just knowing that people are out there listening. So when you support the podcast on Patreon or you send me messages, it really lets me know that what I'm doing matters. So I don't feel like I'm just here talking to people by myself for no reason. So thanks again for all of your support and a couple of other things I would need to mention that I almost forgot about. Number one transcripts are now going to be available for every episode starting with last week's episode. It will take a few days to get the transcript posted on the website so it may not show up initially when you listen to the interview, but if you go back and check within a few days, the transcript should be there also for this particular interview today. I forgot to mention it during the time I was talking with Char but she has made available a handout on feng shui for hospice patients that you can download on the website. If you go to [eolupodcast.com](http://eolupodcast.com) and when you get to that site you have to choose EOLU Podcast on the navigation bar and that will take you to the podcast episodes. So you can find the hand out there on episode number 339. So go there if you'd like to download that hand out and thank you so much to Char who's making that available. Then a final announcement at the beginning of the interview with Char as she is explaining the origin of feng shui. She mentions the Tao te Ching which was written by Lao Tsu and I thought this would be a good time to remind you that I've written an adaptation of the Tao te Ching which is called the Tao of Death. And so it takes the same 89 verses that Lao Tsu wrote in that small book of his and I reinterpret those verses from the perspective of death, life and death combined together. So that book is available on amazon. I wanted to let you know that and I will leave a link for the book in the show notes for this episode as well. So, I just thought I would mention that to you again. So

now without further ado we'll move on to my interview with Sharp Tara shanty as always, remember, I'll come back after this interview with a few takeaways and to say goodbye. So here we go.

Today, I'm so happy to welcome my guest Char Tarashanti is a retired hospice chaplain and certified feng shui consultant. Currently she offers community based education in end of life planning as well as spiritual companionship for those in transition. Her passion is to bring all of her varied training and experience together to help people live their best lives as they prepare for a good death. And today we'll be talking all about shui for hospice patients. So Char, thank you so much for joining me today and being willing to educate us all on this topic.

Char Tarashanti: Thank you for having me, Karen, it's a pleasure to be here.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, I was really excited when you reached out after I did an episode on Swedish death cleaning a few weeks ago to let me know about feng shui and that's right in line with what I was thinking about death cleaning and so I'm really excited to learn more about it. And before we get into your personal story, I thought maybe we should just explain to listeners right at the top what feng shui is so that they have an understanding of what it is we're talking about.

Char Tarashanti: Sure, shui is an ancient art and science that comes out of Chinese culture and the word feng means wind and shui means water. So when you think about the natural elements of wind and water and how they work in the world, what we're going for is balance and harmony because if the wind is moving not at all and say things become very stagnant and there's no motion and it gets very suffocating hard to breathe if there's no circulation of air. but you don't want it moving too fast because then, I mean we get things like tornadoes and cyclones and that kind of thing. So it can actually be destructive if it's moving too fast. So the idea is to have a harmonious balance in the flow of wind and the same thing with water. If water is moving too slowly it becomes stagnant. And if you think of a pond that doesn't have water circulating in it, there's no movement, you know the plant life, you know kind of overtakes it and it becomes an unhealthy environment but also if water is moving too swiftly it can cause damage. We have floods and other kinds of, you know, hurricanes, that type of thing that wreaked havoc in our environment. And also if you think about the yin and yang symbol that Taoist symbol, the circle with the light and the dark half and each half has a bit of the other in it. So again it's about creating that harmony and balance. The development of feng shui was very much influenced by Taoism and the sixth century Chinese philosopher Lao Tsu who wrote the Tao te Ching or the way and the power of the way. And so =from the Taoist and feng shui perspective, death is just one aspect of life. It's part of that whole circle of life. And when we resist it, we create disharmony and imbalance and so by going with the flow and using nature as our model, we can kind of harness that power of nature and use it for our benefit.

Karen Wyatt: Mm I love that. I love that imagery of the wind and the water. That's very powerful. And when I even think about that as I like I look around the room I'm sitting in and I think about balance and harmony and those words are so important and it makes so much sense to me that we want to strive for that in our environment.

Char Tarashanti: Yes. And we're so influenced and impacted by our environment, which surrounds us all the time. And so the purpose of feng shui is to create an environment whether it's our home and living environment, whether it's our work environment or whether it's a hospice care environment that really supports our goals and our values and you know, what we want to accomplish within that space.

Karen Wyatt: Mm hmm. Yeah, that really makes sense to me and I had heard of feng shui in the past without knowing very much about it. But I hadn't really thought about applying it to hospice patients. And it makes me really curious about your story and how you ended up first getting involved with - I don't know which came first - but getting involved both as a hospice chaplain and then a feng shui consultant and how all of that took place.

Char Tarashanti: Actually, feng shui came first. I was a holistic body therapist for a number of years and worked with the energies in the body of my clients. and then I was exposed to the idea of how side energies also have a major impact on what happens within the individual's physical being. And I was fortunate to be introduced to a great teacher Carol Hyder in Minneapolis, Minnesota. She had the first certified feng shui school in the United States and studied directly with professor Thomas Lin Yun, who brought feng shui basically from China to the U.S. He was like the first introduction of feng shui into the Western culture. And so the feng shui interest and training came out of that idea of holistic health, holistic healing and how important our environment is in that. And later as my career progressed I had always enjoyed being around elderly people and hearing their stories and being of assistance to them in whatever way I could. I had done some elder companionship and elder care. And then my mom came to live with me for the last 3.5 years of her life. I was with her in her final time and it just made me realize what a sacred and significant time that is and how important it is to be fully present and to have an environment that's conducive to a peaceful passage. And so at that point I went to seminary because I felt like I needed a credential to put myself out there as a spiritual companion and end of life and I thought that I would like to work in a hospice setting and so I did that and shortly after my ordination and graduation I was invited to fill in for the chaplain in local hospice. She needed to take a leave of absence to relocate elderly parents into a different type of living setting. And so that was my first taste of hospice work and then I went on that was temporary of course. And then I was hired later and worked in several different hospice programs in Minnesota and also for a short time for one here in Arizona where I live now.

Karen Wyatt: Were you able to start introducing feng shui concepts into the hospice when you were working there?

Char Tarashanti: Not as much as I would have wished.

Karen Wyatt: It seems to me like the feng shui concepts might best be taught to family members anyway for arranging their own home rather than having the hospice staff trying to come in and tell people what to do. It's really something to create within your own living environment.

Char Tarashanti: That's true. And I did make suggestions to families. I didn't come in of course as a functionary consultant with them. You know when I was doing the hospice chaplaincy work, but I did offer some suggestions that were well received and appreciated.

Karen Wyatt: Well do you have some thoughts on how paying attention to this, the physical environment, how that might benefit a patient, hospice patient who's at home but also benefit the caregivers and the family members that are there?

Char Tarashanti: Yes. Any time that we can have an environment that feels harmonious that feels supportive for our needs and our desires, our goals. It takes less energy when we have a lot of things in our environment that take extra effort. You know, if there's too much clutter around so that we have to be moving things constantly in order to get to what we need or can't find what we need, that kind of thing. That's an energy drain and we both know how much energy it takes, both being a patient and also being a caregiver. And so the more that we can just make it smooth, easy, efficient and create that pleasant environment, the easier it is for everyone. We want that energy to be unblocked and just flowing in that nice, easy harmonious fashion.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, that makes so much sense. And so putting just a little bit of effort into it up front could make a big difference in how we can manage our energy as we go through this caregiving process.

Char Tarashanti: It's amazing how even just small changes can make a big difference.

Karen Wyatt: Well you shared with me a handout that you created about several elements of feng shui which was really helpful for me as I was trying to learn more about it and so I thought maybe we could go through some of those points that you shared in that handout. The first one you emphasized is just the choice of room where the patient will stay. And so would you talk a little bit about that and how you might advise a family?

Char Tarashanti: Yeah. Well first of all I have to say that there's no one rule that applies in every situation. Every person and every family situation is unique, and so there's a lot of things to take into consideration with it. But first of all we want to empower both the patient and the caregiver and make things as easy for them as possible. So depending on the personality, the age of the patient and the age of other members of the household It is good to choose a location where the patient is accessible to the caregiver, of course, and

that they are not isolated or abandoned in a far off corner of the house. And of course a lot depends on the size and layout of the house too. There's all different living situations and numbers of people within a household and that kind of thing, but having a place that is both keeping the patient involved with the family life around them, particularly early on in the process of dying, is important and yet to allow them enough privacy so that they keep their dignity and have some peace and quiet when they need it. In the beginning of the dying process, it's good to keep things as normal as possible, like keeping the patient in their own bedroom and maybe, if it's a couple, we can still share a bed and that kind of thing. And then as things progress in the dying process, there's going to be inevitable changes because the patient will become weaker and easy access to a bathroom becomes important. That's oftentimes when a patient may be moved from an upstairs location if it's a two story house down to the main floor so that they are able maybe to go sit in the living room if possible or to even go outside if there's an outdoor space that would be conducive to them spending a little time out. And so all of those things go into the choice of room. The most important thing I think is communication within the household to make sure that both the patient's needs and desires are met. And that they feel empowered and supported in their process, but then also to make it as peaceful for the caregiver as possible.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. So I'm sure, I mean as you're describing it's unique to every situation and every patient so it someone, well I'm sure that you would go in and help someone survey the house and look at the available rooms and make a decision about how things would flow the best and where that makes sense. But I can see that it makes a big difference if the patients say if a hospital that is placed in the middle of the living room, that might not be a place where the patient has enough privacy and enough quiet and solitude when they need that though they would be right in the middle of the action that's going on in the house.

Char Tarashanti: Yes and oftentimes that's where the television is located and that's where other family members like to gather and the kind of conversation that might be going on with them would not be conducive to peace and rest for the patient. So yes. And also if there are very young children in the household that need to run and play and they can be noisy and exuberant can really drain their energy too.

Karen Wyatt: Yes. Yes I can imagine that. And then you wrote also about the placement of the bed within that room whatever room you choose where you place the bed. So tell us more about that.

Char Tarashanti: Yes there's something in feng shui called command position. And it has to do with the entrance to the space. So generally command position is kind of in the corner opposite of the entrance to the space and faces that space so that the bed might come out diagonally from the corner or it might be close to the wall, coming out from the wall on either side of the corner. The idea of command position is to put the person in that hospital bed in a position to be able to see who is coming into their space and basically what's going on in the space around them, so that they're not startled or taken by

surprise with people just popping up out of nowhere. I have seen hospital beds placed in and some very difficult positions as far as the patient is concerned. And keeping them away from cold drafts coming in. There was a patient that I saw that her hospital bed was in the living room and it was like, from the front door, it leads straight into the living room. And it was wintertime, and every time that door opened there was like a cold draft that came through directly to the patient. So that was not a good positioning of that hospital bed. Unfortunately once it's placed it's often hard to change it. So getting it right in the first place means giving some real thoughtful planning to where it goes.

Karen Wyatt: And how about windows in the room, is it good to have it facing a window or where the patient can see out of a window? Is that helpful?

Char Tarashanti: It is very nice if they can see out the window. It can feel fairly confining to be bedridden or your mobility becomes more and more limited. So yes, to be able to look out at nature and also get a little bit of fresh air is really nice, maybe open just a crack instead of wide open depending on the weather outside, of course.

Karen Wyatt: And then you mentioned clutter already. But let's talk a little bit more about clutter because well that's a problem I deal with. I mean a lot of us do I guess clutter in various parts of our home. So it sounds like we should make a concerted effort to minimize the clutter everywhere if we can. But especially in the room where the patient is staying.

Char Tarashanti: Yes. Hospice oftentimes involves equipment and always a lot of supplies and that kind of thing. So in order to make things efficient and easy for everyone, it's good if you can remove unnecessary kinds of things. Don't strip the room of everything that the person is familiar with and loves but just taking away any extraneous things that kind of get in the way and make it more difficult to access the supplies that are needed. But then also keeping those supplies contained in a closet or dresser drawers or that kind of thing. It's very hard on people to know that they are requiring all this care. All of that medical paraphernalia around all the time is kind of a reminder to them that they're sick, they're dying. And so keeping that as contained as possible and then for the patient themselves to keep the things that they do need: water to drink, tissues, reading glasses if they use them, and a place to dispose of those tissues when they're done with them. A little waste basket or even like a paper bag taped on the side of the bed or that kind of thing so that everything is just really convenient but organized and contained and any type of organizational tools. They have so many things available now. All the little different organizers that you can purchase in the stores. So yeah just to keep it organized and I have some rather specific things too and I'm just gonna check my list here so that I can pick out a few. So keeping cords for electrical equipment contained and out of the traffic flow so that nobody's stumbling over them or they're not getting in the way. Containing medical supplies in dresser drawers, cabinets or closets. Using organizers to keep the patient's personal items accessible but contained. And I mentioned having a waste basket by the patient's bed and then having a larger waste receptacle for that medical waste if you're changing dressings or anything like that

or incontinence pads on the bed and that kind of thing. Having a larger and covered receptacle for those things and then removing that on a very regular basis. Refreshing floral arrangements if there are flowers in the room every day, adding some fresh water and so that they don't get droopy and dead-looking. Setting up a message center with a spiral or a ring binder type of notebook where you can keep track of incoming calls or calls that need to be made. And also tracking food that is brought in by friends or church, community or whatever, so having a place to record all of that. And of course a place where the meds are kept all in a central place and recording each person who is dispensing those medications. And of course sometimes meds are in the fridge. And you need to include those on that listing so that they're not forgotten just because they aren't there in that place where the other meds are kept. And labeling things if you have a number of different caregivers coming and going, there may be different levels of familiarity with where things are. And so just making it as easy for everyone as possible. And to date perishable food, if food keeps coming in, dating it as it comes. And then you know, paying attention to when it needs to be gotten rid of if there's any leftover, and assigning people to take care of some of these tasks. It shouldn't always be on just one caregiver. And so assigning different people to some of these different tasks is really helpful to just keep things, you know, organized and flowing and nobody is overloaded with too much.

Karen Wyatt: I love the idea of the notebook and writing everything down because I took care of my mom just before she died. It was only five days' time, but basically I didn't sleep very much during those five days and all the hours of each day blurred together and I completely lost track of things. I couldn't remember, when did she get her last dose of medication? When did my aunt call? When did I tell her I would call her back? I was amazed how with so much happening and so much to keep track of and think about all the time, how easy it was to just lose the thread on some of those things that you were just mentioning.

Char Tarashanti: Absolutely. So yes, whether it's one person, one sleep deprived person or whether it's a variety of different people coming and going, really keeping track of things by writing it down is important.

Karen Wyatt: I wanted to ask, would you recommend decorating the room the patient is in with some of their favorite things? If they have pictures they love or items that they really love, would you do that in a thoughtful way?

Char Tarashanti: Absolutely yes, creating an ambience of peace and serenity, but also like you're saying, those favorite things bring back happy memories. If say, for instance, there was a family cabin that they used to go to on vacation or a special place that they visited every year, that kind of thing, having some photographs of those kinds of things either hanging on the wall or in small photo albums. Sometimes photo albums can become very heavy and cumbersome. So keeping some of those favorites in a lighter, smaller book for that, they can just page through occasionally but lovely to have them hanging on the wall. Also pictures of loved ones, whether it's loved ones that have

already made a transition, or those that are living far away and not able to be there in person, but would, you know, like to be remembered by the person that is dying and certainly the dying person being reminded that they are loved by these others. Definitely not keeping things around that would create bad memories or bad feelings if there's some kind of unresolved conflict and family relationships or something. You know, you wrote about it so beautifully in *Seven Lessons for Living from the Dying*, but that doesn't always happen. It's wonderful when it does. So not having those kinds of things around that would create a sense of sadness or anger or turmoil for anyone. Color is so important. We all have a favorite color, mine happens to be purple. And so I would love to be surrounded by all different shades of purple. And we can do that. You know, we probably aren't going to repaint the room at that particular time, but you can bring in bedding and clothing and their favorite bathrobe or that kind of thing. And lighting is also an important thing. We need to have good task lighting and light, like for instance, either the patient or the caregivers for reading directions on the medication labels or maybe the patient is still reading newspapers or books, that kind of thing. So to have task lighting where it's needed, but also when it's not needed, to have some ambient lighting. Ceiling lights generally don't provide good ambient lighting. So a table lamp or two in this space is really nice, so that there's light but it's a soft glow rather than this glaring light.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, that reminds me, I love the screen that you have placed behind you. Are screens helpful in a room to kind of section off the space and give a little bit more intimacy to the place where the patient is.

Char Tarashanti: Yes, absolutely. They're usually quite affordable. You can find them even sometimes in a secondhand shop or something like that. So yes, that's a great idea to have a screen to give a little extra privacy for the person, especially if they, like you say, are placed in a more public or trafficked area of the house.

Karen Wyatt: And one idea I saw that was really lovely, my patient's daughter had all of her mom's friends and relatives and loved ones all over the country make prayer flags for her which they made out of fabric. So they were about 12" squares. And everyone chose different brightly colored fabrics. Some just wrote something on the flag, wrote a message, some embroidered, some drew pictures, some had pictures transferred on to the prayer flags, but they all sent them in and then the daughter made just chains of them that she draped across the ceiling and it was beautiful. It added so much color, but also every single flag was just a sign of love for this patient. She could look up from her bed and see them kind of fluttering against the ceiling. And I was just blown away by how lovely that was. And thoughtful.

Char Tarashanti: Yes. That's a wonderful idea. I love that. I haven't seen it done but I would certainly recommend it.

Karen Wyatt: It takes a little time. So you have to start in advance for people to mail those in.

Char Tarashanti: Oftentimes there's cards that come in too and so having either a bulletin board or a scrapbook that you can put the cards in rather than creating clutter by just having them scattered here and there all over. It's nice to have them in either a scrapbook or posted on the wall.

Karen Wyatt: And then you wrote about texture. How would you add texture into the environment as well?

Char Tarashanti: Well when a person is having discomfort in their body, what they have right next to their skin and what they're laying on is very important. It can be uncomfortable or it can add comfort and be a nice soothing tactile addition to the patient's experience. Silky or flannel or fleece fabric is nice, especially when a patient is at the point where they have to be repositioned in bed by someone else. To have something kind of soft and slippery is helpful because it really facilitates that movement and it's much easier to slide them around in bed a little bit. But also just for interest and something different, having maybe some little pillows or something that have different textures on them, maybe a little yarn loops or that kind of thing. It shouldn't be anything too stiff or prickly that would be unpleasant to touch but just something that adds visual interest. Having some flowers and plants are really nice, even though they may not be felt, just that visual texture. And the color that they bring is really really lovely. I do have kind of a fun story about lighting that I would like to share because it really points out how sometimes you just have to be really creative and not worry about convention so much.

I was a companion of a woman who was in hospice care in her son's home and the family had turned the home office into her care space. There was a window facing her bed. Across the room was a large south window, so it got lots of wonderful sunlight during the day. They had placed some bird feeders outside the window and she loved watching the birds in the early morning and in the later afternoon come and feed at the bird feeders. She was a nature lover, so that was great. During the mid part of the day, from late morning and until about mid afternoon, the sun was pretty strong coming through there. There were blinds on the windows so the sunlight could be regulated, but above the window, there was an arched window with no covering on it. And when she was sitting up in bed, where she often was during that mid part of the day, it was just blasting right in her face. And so I talked to the family about it and they were kind of like, what do we do, you know? And so I said well would you be okay if I brought in kind of a temporary little fix for that? Yeah, they said, that's fine. And because I remembered at home I had a kite that was just about the size of that arch window. It was a little more angular than the arch, but it fit pretty much over the whole window. And so I brought that and managed to get up on a step ladder and set it up on the window ledge so that it kind of formed like a stained glass window as the light came through. And the real synchronicity was that the kite had turquoise and coral colors and a figure of kokopelli, that southwest figure that's so prominent in southwest decor. And when her husband was alive, they used to spend their winters in Arizona, and she loved the colors and the symbols of the southwestern decor. And so she was just thrilled to have that reminder of happy days in the southwest

with her husband. It took care of the lighting problem and then it was just easily removed after she passed.

Karen Wyatt: Oh I love that. I love the reminder you know that sometimes we just have to be creative and try things and not feel boxed in by the situation that we're in, but just let our imaginations go a little bit. And I also love the idea that oftentimes when we do that there are synchronicities, like wonderful things that come about because of that.

Char Tarashanti: Yeah, you often speak of synchronicities and I've experienced so many of them too. When we just allow spirit to move through us and to follow that little voice inside that says, oh, I think I have an idea.

Karen Wyatt: And really it makes sense to me, creativity is probably really what it takes in order to create this harmony and balance within a room again because every situation is different. So no one can go in already knowing exactly how they might arrange a room. You have to be in the moment and figure it out as you go and solve the problems that arise while you're in the process of it.

Char Tarashanti: And, for me, as an outsider coming in, it's important to be respectful of the family in their space and not push anything on them that they aren't really wanting to do or certainly not create any permanent changes or anything. So yeah, it just takes creativity.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. And I mentioned to you already that, you know, I took care of my mom just for a short time, but she was in her bedroom, which is where she wanted to be, but it was quite messy partly because she hadn't been feeling well for months. So she had piles of clothes on every chair and you know, everywhere in the room and jewelry that was scattered because she just hadn't been well enough to pick up after herself. And so one day while she was taking a nap, I thought, I will straighten up her room because I had this sense that it felt heavy just to be in the room. It felt like a burden of all of the clutter. So while she was sleeping I hung up the clothes, I put everything away and when she woke up she was so angry at me for doing that and I realized I didn't ask, I didn't talk to her about it. I just did it thinking it would be a nice thing. But she said those are my things, those are my things. I need to look around and I need to see them there in the room. And so I wondered if you ever encountered anything like that and how you might handle that kind of situation.

Char Tarashanti: Well, the answer that I would have for anything like that is communication ahead of time. I think it's really important and you know, even if you have the best of intentions, which of course you did, it's really important for the patient, the dying person, to feel like they are in charge of their process and their space. So communicating ahead of time and being gentle, not being critical and saying, oh this room is such a mess, it needs to be cleaned up. But saying, you know mom, it would just maybe make it easier for me to provide the care for you, and it might be nicer for you instead of seeing these these piles of clothes and things kind of scattered around, would it

be okay if I went ahead and did a little tidying up and then and also asking where would you like this? Do you want this hung in the closet? Do you want it hung on the door hook or can we put this jewelry in the jewelry box or you know, just asking for what their preferences are. And then maybe suggesting okay, you know, now there's a place for this base of lovely flowers here with some cards or you know, whatever.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. I can clearly see I failed, I failed to communicate in advance. That was a big problem. And just also making an assumption that, because the clutter was bothering me, that it would also be bothering her and to not find out about that and ask her what she thought about those things being out and being scattered around. So you're so right, just a little communication ahead of time would have changed that whole situation, I'm sure.

Char Tarashanti: Yeah. And keeping familiar things that really matter to the person more visible and then removing those things that aren't as important.

Karen Wyatt: Yes, definitely. Are there one or two things that you would say are the most important? If we can't manage all of these elements in the room where a loved one is, what should we focus on first or most importantly?

Char Tarashanti: I would say definitely the choice of room itself and the placement of the bed within the room are the most important. And then the clutter clearing. These are really lovely things and not that difficult to put into action but if you really just have to focus on those couple of things, I think that's the most important.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, that definitely makes sense to me.

Char Tarashanti: Also, I think it's lovely especially if a person has a strong spiritual connection either to a religion or a spiritual path or, you know, if nature is their spirituality. You can create just a very simple little focus area with either statues or pictures, you know, art, that kind of thing that symbolizes their belief, whether it be, you know, Jesus or Buddha or just a beautiful photograph from nature. To give them something to really focus on, and also bringing in music they may have enjoyed, especially at the end. You can play other music up until those last days and hours but then bringing in some music that's either very soothing and calming or maybe has a connection to their spiritual tradition, at the very end, is really nice.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah that really makes sense. I heard a really lovely recording of harp music that I think would be really soothing and very beautiful to listen to.

Char Tarashanti: Yes, yes, harp music is nice, solo piano.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, I remember one time talking to a family and suggesting that maybe they could pick out some music to play for their loved one. And when I, the next day, when I came back to visit they were playing Christmas carols but it was a really loud

version of jingle bells playing. And I thought, this isn't exactly what I was thinking in terms of music that would be soothing. But they said, well our mom loved Christmas carols so we just thought she'd like listening to those and I realized, oh well you know, maybe she did and maybe that was the right music for her, I don't know. But again, it's unique to every person.

Char Tarashanti: It is and the communication, asking, you know, what would you like to hear? There's a lot of wonderful ambient music out there sometimes called new age music too that can just, you know, create a very peaceful environment.

Karen Wyatt: And I noticed on your list, you included tasty food and treats and so I love I love that because I'm all about food and treats. So I wanted to ask you about what thoughts you have around there?

Char Tarashanti: Yeah. Well, you know, we know that we don't want to force food on hospice patients, but even just, you know, giving them a tiny sip of something or, or putting a little bit of chocolate mousse on their lips and letting them lick it up, you know, just to, to remind them of the taste of a fresh berry and a little dollop of maybe whipped cream or something. Those sensory kinds of things are so important. But then of course, for the caregiver and for visitors and especially if you have hospice volunteers coming in, sometimes to have some nice healthy, nutritious, but very appealing kinds of snacks. A bowl of washed and polished fruit. And letting them know specifically this is for you, help yourself, because it can be energy draining. And food, you know, restores our energy. And it's a nice communal thing too. If you have a room where the family gathers to have some snacks and things, some pretzels and M&M's or whatever the favorite family treats are. It just creates a sense of community and a sense of ease and support for people.

Karen Wyatt: And so that might be a nice thing to ask for help with if someone volunteers and says, can I bring you something, what do you need? To have a list of some of those snacks that other people could bring in so that they get replenished every few days. But that sounds like a nice way for other people to contribute.

Char Tarashanti: Absolutely, yes. And being creative about finding all different ways. I think it's so sad when I see caregivers thinking that they have to do it all themselves and people really want to contribute. They want to help in whatever way they can. So if you can't accept the help for your own sake, accept it for their sake so that they can feel like they're doing something to make this situation better for everyone.

Karen Wyatt: I remember one of the things my mom asked for, she had been in the hospital a few weeks earlier and she kept talking about how she loved the custard. They served her custard on her dinner tray and she wanted that. And I said well I could go to the store and she said, no I want the custard from the hospital, I want the one the hospital serves. So I ended up driving to the hospital. I went into the cafeteria and I spoke to a woman and I said I don't know if this is possible, but I said my mom is home, she's in the

last days of her life and she wants some of your custard. And the lady said I'll be right back and she came back with some little plastic containers of custard for me, and all mom could do was take maybe one tiny spoonful at a time. But you're right just to be able to taste that again. The coolness of it and the texture and the taste and I don't know, most people don't think fondly of hospital food but for my mom somehow it was a really positive memory.

Char Tarashanti: That's interesting. My mom loved custard too. I think there is something about it like you said it's very cool and soothing and moist, yeah.

Karen Wyatt: Maybe it's generational too because maybe that's something they had at home when they were younger which I would say like I've never made it before. So I've never really served it to anyone but maybe that was part of their lives when they were young.

Char Tarashanti: I think it's true. And I remember, yeah I remember my mom making custard. She had these little custard cups and I you know, she'd put the custard cups in a pan of water and put them in the oven. I never successfully made custard myself but I do remember her making it.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, that's interesting. So I guess another example of like being thoughtful and asking questions and listening to what our loved one wants or what they prefer and maybe it's a time when they're kind of doing a life review and they're remembering things from a different time in life and just a longing to taste that again and to have it again.

Char Tarashanti: Yes. Yeah.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. That's very sweet. Well are there any other things that you think we should be paying attention to or noticing in the environment for our loved ones?

Char Tarashanti: Well the last thing that I have on my little list is scent, whether it's removing the unpleasant scents like I mentioned with taking out waste and that kind of thing, but also adding some pleasant scent into the room but not artificial. Not, you know, those perfumy air fresheners and that kind of thing. What I really highly recommend are pure organically grown essential oils. And lavender is kind of the universal essential oil, but a lot of other ones can be very pleasant too. I was helping a friend of mine with her mom in her mom's last days and her mom's name was Rose. And so in in the very last hours of her life I brought rose essential oil and we anointed her mom with rose oil so that she you know when she was taking her last breath she was having those whiffs of rose which was her favorite scent you know as she was as she was leaving this world.

Karen Wyatt: That's beautiful.

Char Tarashanti: And you can add it to bath water, you can add it to linens, you know, for the bed. You can diffuse it into the room just so it isn't too overpowering. It should be very gentle.

Karen Wyatt: I was wondering about food smells like baking cookies or brownies or something that has an aroma. But I, but I could imagine that might not be good if someone's nauseated.

Char Tarashanti: It can add to the nausea or cause nausea. Yes. So again the communication is so important.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah. Yeah, that totally makes sense. Well Char, you've just given us a wealth of information. It's really interesting to me, but it also makes total sense and I'm so excited to know more about this. And I'm sure our listeners are too, because we have a lot of people from hospice who listen in and death doulas and even caregivers and people who will one day be caregivers and I feel like this is, it's really valuable, but it's actually practical information. These are things that we should be able to implement fairly easily for our loved ones.

Char Tarashanti: Yes. And just like I said, small things can make such a big difference. And so with just a little thought, a little care, a little planning. It can, you know, just really make a different experience for everyone.

Karen Wyatt: Yeah, for caregivers and patients alike. Right? Well Char, I know that you mentioned that you're retired even though you actually still do work because I can hear from your stories. You get called upon by neighbors and friends and family members. But if anyone listening would like to get in touch with you, I know you don't have a website, but is it possible if they should have questions for you or need a little advice from you?

Char Tarashanti: Absolutely. I'm always happy to respond to people. And I'm happy to give out my email address, which is [ctarashanti@gmail.com](mailto:ctarashanti@gmail.com).

Karen Wyatt: And I can put that in the show notes for this episode of someone I didn't get a chance to write it down so they could look it up, and that's very generous of you. Thank you so much.

Char Tarashanti: I'm happy to do it. I love hearing from, you know, I love hearing other people's stories too. And you know, if they're having a difficulty with some specific situation and I can be of help, I would be very glad to do that.

Karen Wyatt: Yes. And you're obviously very creative. So it would be fun to brainstorm with you how to solve a certain problem or how to make things better. So Char, thank you so much for joining me today and just sharing all of this information.

Char Tarashanti: You are so welcome. It's been a great pleasure and I hope it will be helpful to a number of people.

Karen Wyatt: I'm sure it will. I actually believe a lot of people will have had their eyes opened a little bit today through this conversation. So thanks again.

Char Tarashanti: Great. You're so welcome.

Karen Wyatt: I hope you enjoyed my conversation with Char Tarashanti. As I said in the introduction to this, I found it very interesting and I learned so much from her, particularly some ideas of things I could have done differently when I was helping my mom at the end of her life and things that I would like to incorporate in the future. And Char and I even talked afterwards that this could be part of our end of life planning for ourselves to leave notes for our family about already as we look at our own homes like where where might we want a bed to be placed if we needed to be in a hospital bed and what windows we would like to face and what music we would like to have available or aromatherapy in the room. Small things like that that we think of now, that might be helpful to whoever is caring for us at the end of our lives. So that could be really simple to just make a small list of things to attach to our end of life planning because once again, these little details can actually make a big difference as Char was saying. So I think it's quite lovely to give some thought to this idea of harmony and balance in the physical surroundings when we're caring for someone at the end of life and just to pay a little bit more attention to those details. So I hope you got something from it too that will be helpful to you at some point. And be sure to download Char's handout on the website. And she generously offered her email address, if anyone would like to contact her as well. If you find information like this helpful and you enjoy this podcast, be sure to recommend it to other people who might also benefit from listening. You can share a single episode with them or just to show them how to open up the podcast app on their phone and find End of Life University in case they would like to listen in. It's also really helpful if you subscribe or follow the podcast wherever you happen to listen and then leave a rating and review for the podcast, especially if it's a positive one because that increases the ranking of this podcast. So when people are searching for content like this, they're able to find it. And the real goal here is to just keep growing this community of people who care about end of life issues and want to be awake and aware of all the options that are available out there at the end of life. You can also, as I mentioned before, support the podcast on my Patreon page at [patreon.com/eolu](https://patreon.com/eolu) if you'd like to become a member of our team and receive some bonuses for doing that. So thanks again to everyone who has been helping out for several years now with contributions to the podcast. So until we're together next week with another new interview, remember we're here for love. So face your fear, be ready for whatever happens next and love each and every moment of this very precious life. Bye bye.

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