



■ Mireille Hayden preparing for her workshop on end of life care.

End of life care – the day no one wants to talk about

Charity worker's regret at lack of plans

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» Despite the fact it will happen to us all one day, dying is still a hard subject to broach, but one Golders Green woman decided to break that taboo in her own family and make plans for the day no-one wants to talk about.

Although Mireille Hayden, of Asmunds Hill, has worked in end of life care for most of her 10-year NHS career and commissioned the care people would receive at the end of their lives on a day-to-day basis, she had never asked her own mother what she had planned for her own future.

"To practice what I preach," Mrs Hayden said, "I approached my mum about a year ago to find out whether she had thought of her end of life, what she wanted, whether she had made any plans. She laughed. She said she was way too young for all that."

Health

At 65, fighting fit with no medical problems and a busy life looking after her husband, walking the dogs and caring for six grandchildren and two cats, Felicity Herbert seemed the picture of health.

"It was exhausting just looking at her. So I never brought the subject up again," Mrs Hayden said.

Then on October 10 last year Mrs

Hayden received a call that would change her life forever. Her mother suffered a severe stroke in the night and had not been found until the morning.

"We were told she was going to die. She's so young and so fit," Mrs Hayden said. "At the moment she's still in hospital, unable to walk or talk. Her left brain is completely dead. She will never recover and I don't know how long she will live."

Struggle

Her mother had not made plans for her funeral or made a will and the family has no idea how she would like to share her possessions.

Mrs Hayden added: "What I know for sure is that mum would have never wanted us to worry and struggle because she never put her final plans in order. But she can't do anything about it now. When she dies, I don't know what we'll do."

According to new statistics just 21 per cent of people in London have discussed the kind of funeral they would want with their partner, and only 23 per cent have shared whether they have a will.

Mrs Hayden has now left the NHS and has started the charity Gentle Dusk that actively promotes the practical steps people can take to sort out their end of life care regardless of what age they are.