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## Sociology Of Death And Dying: Changing Death Management Practices

Death has been a part of life since the beginning. It is one of the most certain things in life. How one deals with death and how cultures treat the dead has changed over the centuries. This change in death management practices includes but is not limited to how death is defined, infant mortality, life expectancy, children's understanding of death, where people die, the deathbed scene, cause of death, several things that happen after death, and the role media has played. How death is defined has evolved throughout centuries. In the past, death was "determined by the absence of heartbeat and breathing". Today, death is more difficult to define due to the increase in technology.

An individual could have brain death, clinical death or cellular death. Brain death is when functions performed by the brain-stem cease, but a heartbeat and other functions remain. To determine if brain death has occurred there are four main criteria that must be met. There must be a "lack of receptivity and response to external stimuli, absence of spontaneous muscular movement and spontaneous breathing, absence of observable reflexes, including brain and spinal reflexes, and the absence of brain activity, as signified by a flat electroencephalogram". If this criterion is met and there is no heartbeat, then clinical death has occurred. Cellular death is when respiration, brain activity, and the heartbeat cease.

In the modern day, there are multiple ways to define death; however, there are two things that they all will have in common and that is that once death has occurred it is irreversible. Due to increasing technology and medicine, the average life expectancy in the United States has gone from 47 to 78. Before modern medicine, it was common for women to die during childbirth and babies to be stillborn. Both factors played into how children experienced death. Before and during the early 1900s, children were familiar with death because of a parent or a sibling. In the 21st century, children may be familiar with death for the same or different reasons. However, the average (healthy) child in America should live for seven or eight decades.

The leading cause of death has shifted from acute infections to chronic illness. This is called an epidemiological transition or the redistribution of death from young to old and the study of health and disease through patterns is epidemiology.

Death is one of the most certain things in life, but where a person will die is unclear. During the Middle Ages when someone was dying it was a public ceremony. An individual would be "surrounded by friends, family, children, and even passersby". Religion played a key role in

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what became known as the deathbed scene. The individual that was dying would be surrounded by family and friends and tell them their wrongdoings. These family members and friends would then go to a priest and confess these sins. During this time death was not only a physical experience for the individual, but a spiritual one. After a few centuries, science began to play an extensive role in the deathbed scene.

Due to the increase in life-extending medicine and technology, many individuals may live out their last days surrounded by strangers. There are now institutions that house those who are dying, and these institutions are hospitals and nursing homes. If an individual is at these facilities for a longer period of time they might get to know others, but many will die not knowing who they are surrounded by. The leading cause of death has changed throughout history, but there are four main reasons death occurs. There is age, disease, homicide and suicide. Centuries ago the cause of death of an individual was unclear, but many believed it was due to evil, behavior excesses, wind or moon etc.. During the 1900s, it was acute infections like that killed many people. Throughout centuries disease has been one of the leading causes of death. Today most of these diseases can be cured through modern medicine. However, some of these diseases may cause death quickly or become what is known as a chronic illness. How an individual is treated after death is where death management practices have had significant change. Where the body goes, what is done with it (medically), how an individual is memorialized, and the power the dead is what has changed the most.

In earlier centuries, due to the lack of technology, how an individual died was not of high priority. Since the leading cause of death was infections and diseases, many were not concerned with how the person died, but with mourning and burial. In the modern era, an autopsy or the examination of the body to investigate the cause of death, might be performed. If the individual died under certain circumstances, and it is theirs or the families wish, they can donate their organs. An organ transplant is when living tissues are taken from the donor to a recipient. The first organ transplant occurred in 1954, so this life-saving medicine is very recent. It is also feasible that the individual will become a cadaver. However, many do not know how their body will be used. The body can be used for teaching anatomy to medical students, research and experiments, or to demonstrate the latest medical technology. After the body has been taken care of, the individual will be prepared for burial or memorialization.

During the Roman Era and Middle Ages, individuals were buried in a graveyard that was typically by a church. Unless, the individual was of high status or significance, they would have no grave marker. Today, it is unlikely that one would come across an unmarked grave of someone that has died recently. This is part of how memorializing the dead has changed. It is also possible that an individual will choose to not be buried and be cremated instead. Different parts of the world have different customs when it comes to memorializing the dead. In earlier times, it was typical for the mourning and memorialization period to last days, months, and even

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years.

In modern America, it is typical for a funeral or a memorial service to be held for the individual. The power and names of the dead differs from place to place. Traditionally, the dead are respected and if they are not it is believed that harm could result. In traditional culture the person's name is not said because it is believed to be a way of summoning the individual and will disturb them; this is called name avoidance. Name avoidance is seen in modern culture, but it is a way of coping with the death of a loved one, so that one is not painfully reminded of the loss.

In the 21st century, media plays an extensive role in one's life and it plays a fundamental role in how one learns about death. This can be from a newspaper, television, social media, and films. When one reads the newspaper or watches the news it is likely that one would "find an assortment of accidents, murders, suicides, and disasters involving sudden, violent deaths". Typically, if the individual that died was "the average Joe or Jill," then their death might be in the obituary section of the newspaper. There is an average of 2.7 televisions in an American household and there are hundreds of films or shows that depict death. Today, one does not even have to own a television to see these shows. Social media and phones allow information and entertainment to be easily accessible. This also allows information about an individual's death to be spread quickly. In earlier days this information would not have reached many people. Media being so accessible can also alter how early of an age one learns about death.

The inevitability of death affects those in the past, present, and future. While death is a constant the customs surrounding it are ever changing. Some of these customs, as pointed out previously, are the same and many are different. The way people cope with death through traditions, funerals, and memorialization has changed. Even though the way people deal with death has changed, it is still a part of life. Death will always be a part of life even if technology has allowed it to be prolonged.

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