

End of Life Doulas and General Practice

Supporting patients and whānau in the space between clinical contact, alongside general practice and wider healthcare teams.

Most of the Final Year Happens Outside Clinical Care

Most of the final year of life happens in homes and communities, with much of the experience of illness, caregiving and dying occurring outside healthcare settings. Families often navigate:

- caregiving responsibilities
- uncertainty about illness progression or symptoms
- emotional and relational strain
- practical and logistical decisions
- conversations about dying and death

What Is an End of Life Doula?

An End of Life Doula is a non-clinical companion providing time-rich emotional, practical, spiritual, and social support before, during, and after death. Support may include:

- emotional support
- practical preparation
- whānau communication
- education, navigation and reassurance

Doulas do not replace clinical care.

What Doulas Do Not Do

- administer medication
- diagnose or provide clinical care
- give medical advice
- direct or override clinical care plans

Clinical concerns are referred back to the appropriate healthcare team.

How Doulas Complement General Practice and Palliative Care

Doulas provide relational continuity between clinical contact, supporting patients and whānau primarily in the time spent outside healthcare settings. Doulas encourage informed choice, confidence, and autonomy. Emerging evidence suggests Doula support may help reduce crisis presentations and strengthen caregiver confidence.

Doula support may include:

- emotional support
- practical preparation and planning
- family communication and dynamics
- navigation, reassurance, and understanding
- continuity of presence

The roles are complementary, not competing.

NHS Evidence

www.eol-doula.uk/leeds-nhs-commissioned-project

When Might Doula Support Be Helpful :

- caregiver strain or whānau overwhelm is increasing
- practical, emotional or psychosocial complexity is high
- Social, whānau or community support is limited
- patients or whānau feel overwhelmed navigating the health system or facing difficult decisions
- someone is transitioning home after hospital or hospice care
- additional non-clinical support may help between appointments
- conversations about deterioration, dying, death or future planning are difficult or being avoided
- people want support to prepare for the dying process
- whānau would benefit from guidance around vigils, after-death care or practical preparation
- a person wishes to remain at home, where this aligns with their wishes and care needs

How to Connect with a Doula

Clinicians may wish to consider Doula support by:

- informing patients or whānau that End of Life Doulas exist as a non-clinical support option
- directing interested patients or whānau to ELDA
- encouraging early connection where caregiver strain, psychosocial complexity, or transition home may increase support needs

Further Information

End of Life Doula Alliance Aotearoa (ELDA)

Website: www.eldaa.org.nz

Email: info@eldaa.org.nz



ELDA maintains professional standards, scope of practice, and ethical guidelines for Doulas in Aotearoa.