

Book promotes giving patients more control at the end

By Peter Whoriskey, Washington Post

In a book, “The Conversation”, physician Angelo E. Volandes argues that the the U.S. healthcare system is failing patients in their final acts: Americans are botching death.

The problem is that hospitals and doctors are pre-programmed to “do everything” for dying patients – that is, attempt every last measure to prolong life, even if its probably futile, painful and unwanted.

To a certain kind of Washington policy wonk, the trouble with “doing everything” is that it causes soaring medical costs and billion-dollar financial woes.

But those are not the concerns of Volandes, a Harvard researcher who practices as a hospitalist. Instead, he sees the extreme end-of-life measures as a tragedy for patients – a tragedy that could be prevented if only doctors asked patients what they want. The patients are the ones who must bid farewell to life being poked and prodded and filled with tubes by strangers in the hospital.

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