



What is the value of an End-of-Life Doula?

It may be difficult for prospective clients to see the value of an end-of-life or death doula. There are a couple of reasons for this. One reason is that the role is relatively new. Many people are not aware of doulas serving in end-of-life care. This leads to the likely connection to the fact that many people are not *aware* of the needs that will arise when someone they love is facing death.

One of these needs is hospice care. But, hospice care alone cannot fulfill the dying person and his or her family's needs. Generally, the hospice team is well equipped to help patients and families work through fear and sadness, and a hospice social worker will assist individuals and families in locating additional resources, but even if a personal care aide is hired to be present in assisting with the activities of daily living, a family will likely still be overwhelmed with all of the needs that occur when someone is dying.

A doula is not a personal care aide and cannot administer medical services. If a certified doula also has a personal care aide certificate or nursing license, he or she may serve in multiple capacities if the services are agreed upon by both the doula and the person(s) receiving care.

The value of a doula lies outside of both the necessary personal care and medical care. A doula may overlap with the provisions of hospice care in a few different ways, but this does not reduce the necessity of a certified doula.

How does a doula participate in filling the gap experienced by families when a dying person is referred to hospice?

1. **No regulations on time and visits:** a doula is not regulated by an insurance reimbursement structure. (This also includes the time before and after hospice care) A doula can stay with a family throughout the entire end-of-life process, which lasts much longer than the point where the hospice team must exit the scene.
2. **Professional commitment:** some of the greatest services are done through volunteer work, but this should not underestimate the value of professional services.

The unregulated time of a professional doula is a game-changer for families and dying people. A certified doula will guide a family every step of the way keeping everything organized and on time while offering a family the time to be with their dying loved one. A doula also incorporates faith-based grief care and engaged support from the faith community.

3. **Community engagement:** doulas serve as a link between church communities and the patient and family. What other needs need to be met? Housekeeping, food service, visitation, respite care, prayer chains, and more.
4. **Doula care services:** helping with memory projects and completing a life review have become popular doula services. A hospice volunteer could also help in some capacity with these important facets of death care, but hiring a Christian doula gives these tasks fresh importance. Regret and the need to clear up estranged relationships may haunt dying people and people they love. God's unlimited grace and forgiveness provide the way forward. Joy and sadness should also be embraced at the end-of-life.
5. **Comfort care plans:** this work includes helping the family care for the patient, and establishing visitation schedules for community visitors, friends, and family. Doulas support families in keeping with the care plan for the highest dignity of the patient and peace of mind for the family. Oftentimes, panic sets in as death arrives. Doulas help families and patients through this difficult transition.
6. **Vigil & funeral planning:** doulas help families prepare for the death vigil, a dynamic time of waiting and expectation for Believers. Once a death has occurred, the funeral displays the family and community's faith in God and their commitment to the deceased human being. Doulas can assist in preparations for this event.
7. **Continued Support:** new needs will arise after a death has occurred and a family settles into a new way of life. A doula that has journeyed with a family will stay a supportive presence in the days to come.