OBJECTIVES

1. To describe two activities that the older person can no longer do.
2. To identify two qualities of the woman's psychological state.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Healthcare professionals and health professions students

EXERCISE

An elderly person who is most likely a woman narrates this poem, The Last Decision, by Maya Angelou. The poem is useful for discussions on death, dying, human worth, quality of life and grief.

- Begin by reading the poem aloud. One person can read it to the group or the group can read it together, or take turns reading one of the stanzas.
- Discuss the disabilities and inconveniences that the older woman has and how it impacts her quality of life: – i.e. “print that has become too small,” “the food that is too rich.”

Notice how the poem is structured with a loss in each stanza and a concluding refrain which is the same; she will give up reading, then eating, then listening—and then life.

In her last line she says: “today, I'll give up living.”

As a health care provider how would you interact with an older person who felt this way? Discuss strategies that you might use to recognize what the older person is feeling. Discuss hopelessness and helplessness and how it impacts care.

ADAPTATIONS

Used in the Use of Story to Enhance Person-Centered Care workshop to help healthcare professionals reflect on the individual stories and narratives that each older adults may experience as they lose function and experience frustration with the losses.