

When the news is not good

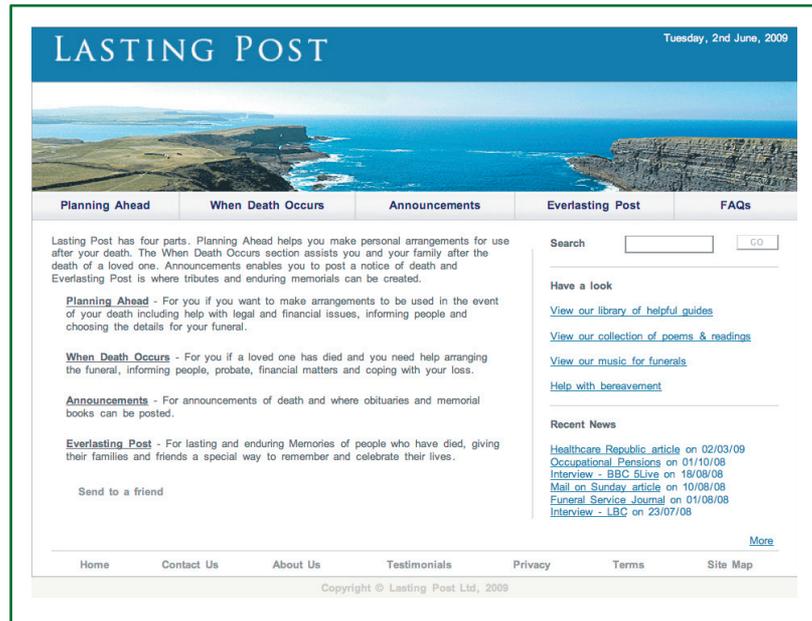
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One thing about being a doctor, whether in general practice or in hospital, that never gets easier, is telling a patient that their test results are not good—and then fielding the inevitable “How long have I got?”

Once the patient has begun to absorb the bad news, or perhaps even in expectation of bad news, most patients want to deal with all sorts of practical questions, from updating their will, to what they want played at the funeral. Many doctors will therefore welcome, as I did, the website Lasting Post. It is a free resource to point patients to information that can be of real help. It also aims to help those left behind, in both practical and supportive ways. When I saw this website, I was so impressed that I became its medical adviser.

Lasting Post was brought into being when one of the founders lost her mother from Alzheimer’s disease, and her brother from a stroke, in quick succession. Its aim is to encourage individuals and families to plan for and deal with death and bereavement in a practical yet sensitive way. The website needs health-care professionals and businesses such as funeral directors or local councils to bring it to the attention of those people who could do with guidance on planning the last phase of their lives. It has four sections: planning ahead, when death occurs, announcements, and everlasting post.

Planning ahead is for those who want to give formal instructions and express wishes in respect of their own death. The topics range from



the role and selection of executors to charitable donations, to who needs to be informed, and the details of funeral arrangements. Users can simply print off the relevant pages or register to save their information online. All information thus stored can only be accessed and amended thereafter by logging in with their personal password.

When death occurs covers in full detail, not only on the legal and red-tape aspects of death, but also pays attention to the emotional side. For example, how you can expect to be affected by grief and how you can express condolences both meaningfully and correctly. It also contains a bereavement community and mutual support area.

In **Announcements**, families can make a notification of death, and obituaries and memorial books

can be set up. The fourth section, **Everlasting post**, is for writing about memories of people who have died, giving their families and friends a way to remember and celebrate their lives.

Since its launch last year, the site has been steadily building its user base and is constantly updated and refined. It really is worth a look, and the volunteers who run it would be particularly keen to receive feedback from doctors about whether their patients and patients’ families find it a useful resource.

I act as medical advisor to Lasting Post in a voluntary capacity.

www.lastingpost.com