

Saying Goodbye

Oncology nurses Debra Rodgers, Debbie Roth, and Beth Calmes created this “bathing and honoring practice” to help families—and themselves—bring dignity and sacredness to a hospital death.

First the body of the dead person is washed and dressed in clothes from home or a clean gown. Then the nurses encourage relatives and friends to anoint the hair with lavender oil, and recite:

“We honor (Jane’s) hair, that the wind has played with.” Next a dab of oil is gently rubbed on the brow, as someone says, “We honor (Jane’s) brow, the birthplace of her thoughts.” In each succeeding sentence, you can insert the name of the dead person in the appropriate place:

We honor (your) eyes that have looked on us with love and viewed the beauty of the earth.

We honor your nostrils, the gateway of breath.

We honor your ears that listened for our voices.

We honor your lips that have spoken truth.

We honor your shoulders that have borne burdens and strength.

We honor your heart that has loved us.

We honor your arms that have embraced us.

We honor your hands that have held our hands and done so many things in this life.

We honor your legs that carried you into new places of new challenge.

We honor your feet that walked your own path through life.

We give thanks to the gifts that you have given us in our lifetime.

We give thanks for the memories that we created together.

We have been honored to be a part of your life.¹

¹ Adapted with permission from Debra Rodgers, et al, “Nursing Care at the Time of Death: A Bathing and Honoring Practice,” *Oncology Nursing Forum* Vol. 43, May 2016. © 2016 Oncology Nursing Forum. This version is from Katy Butler’s *The Art of Dying Well*, Scribner 2019. All rights reserved.

