

Perspectives: “End of Life” Care

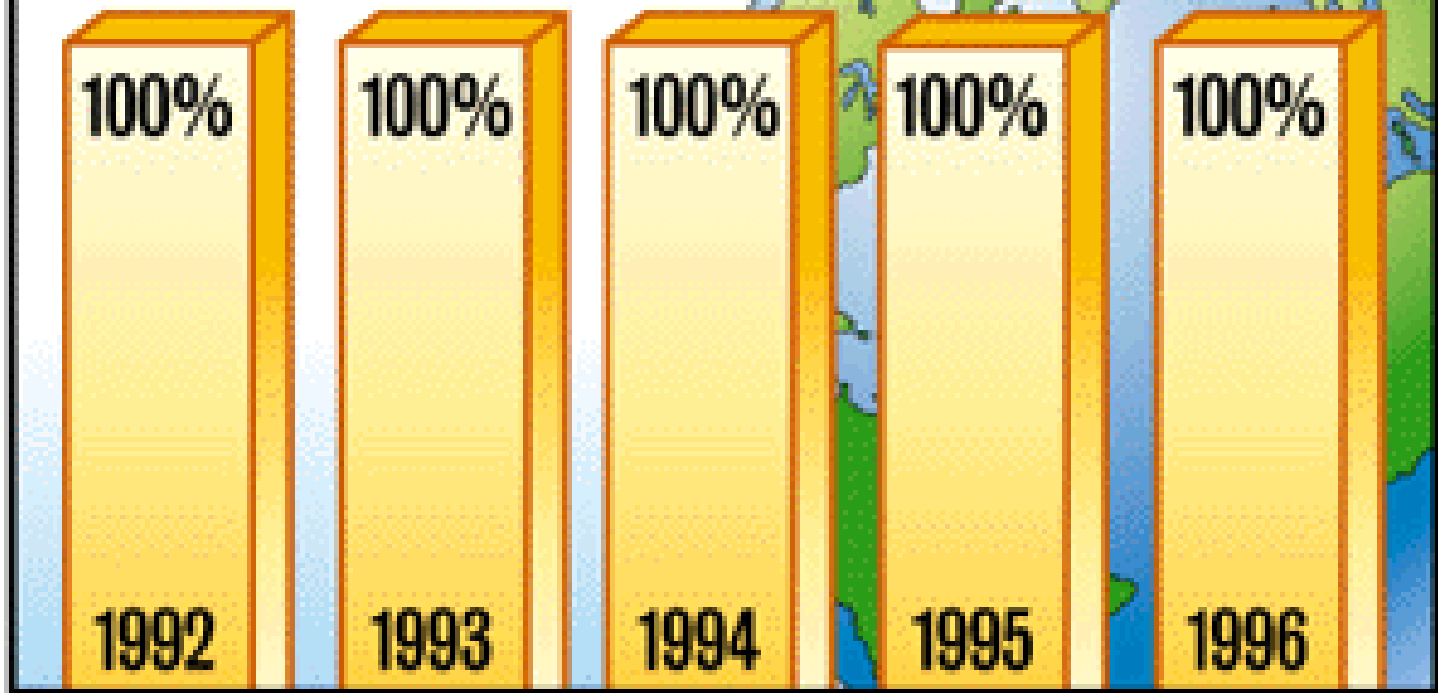
Joanne Lynn, MD, MA, MS
Clinical Improvement Expert
Colorado Foundation for Medical Care
DrJoanneLynn@gmail.com

Framing Our Issues

- Travelling the Valley of the Shadow of Death...
- Trajectories and categories
- Numbers and caregivers
- Lies, manipulations, and statistics

And what we could do...

World Mortality Rate

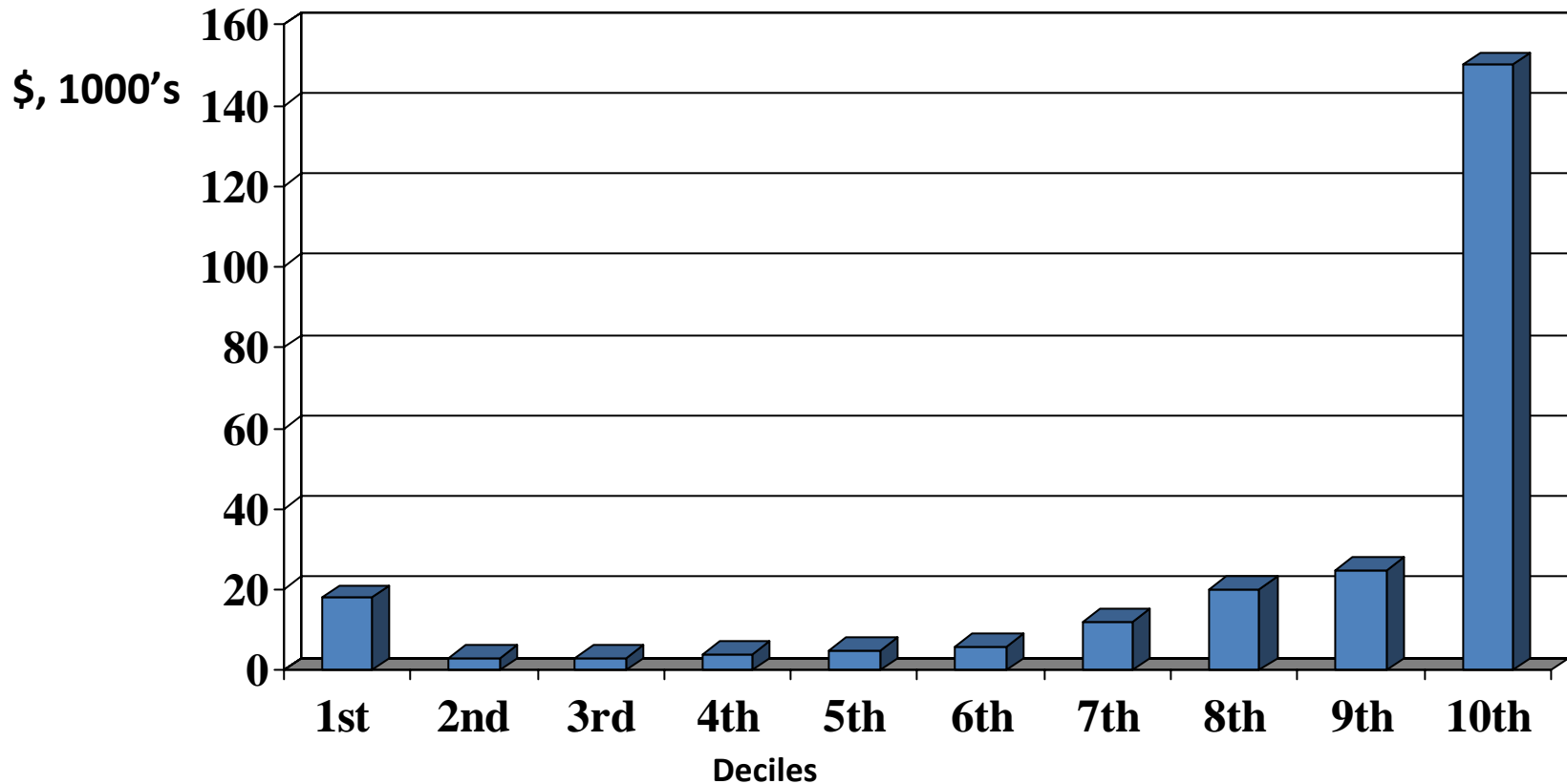




How Americans Die: A Century of Change

| | <u>1900</u> | <u>2000</u> |
|---------------------|--|---|
| Age at death | 46 years | 78 years |
| Top Causes | Infection Accident Childbirth | Cancer Organ system failure Stroke/Dementia |
| Disability | Not much | 2-4 yrs before death |
| Financing | Private, modest | Public, substantial- in US - 83%, Medicare ~1/2 of women, Medicaid |

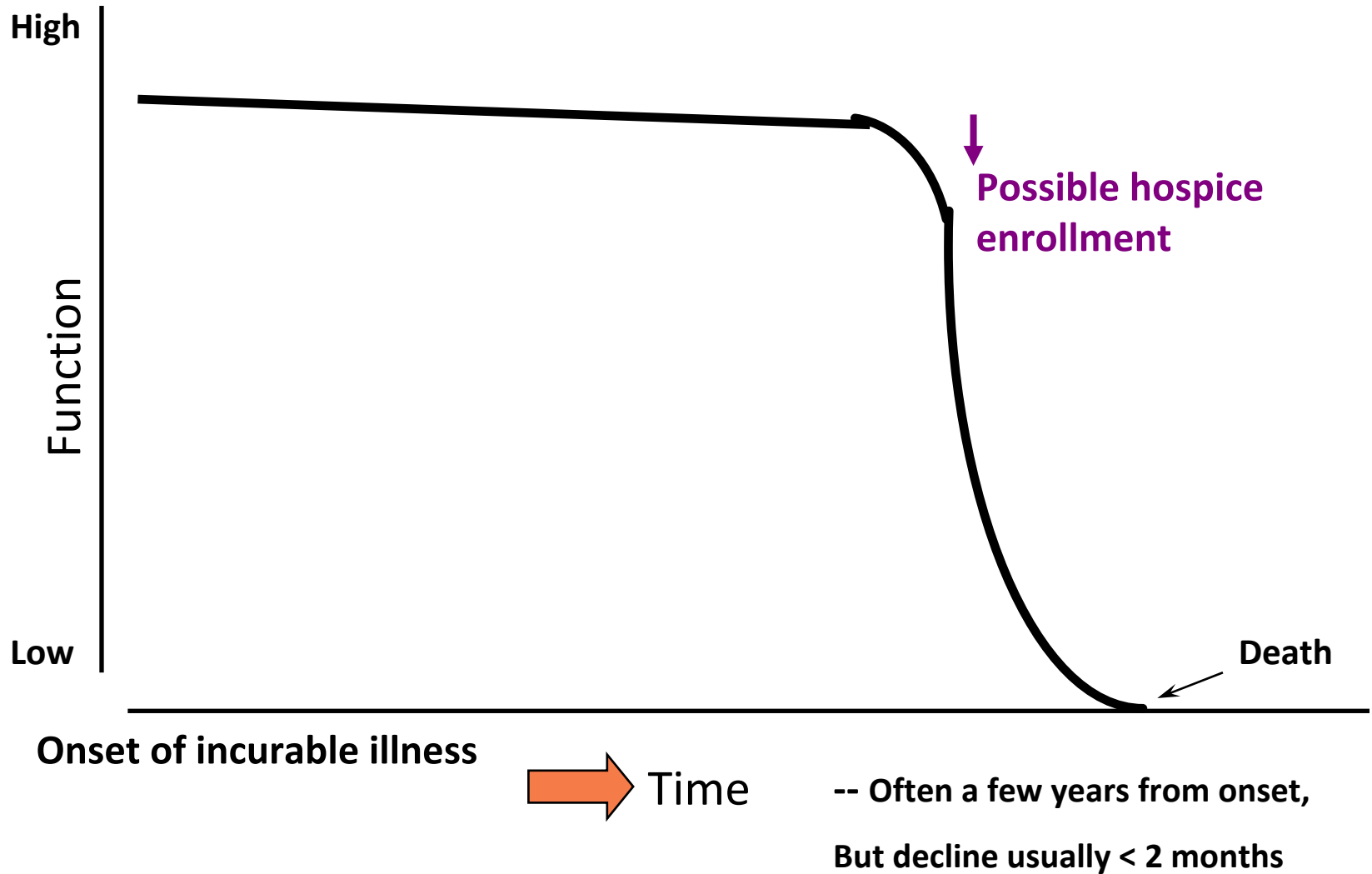
Rough Estimate of Costs per Decile over the lifespan*



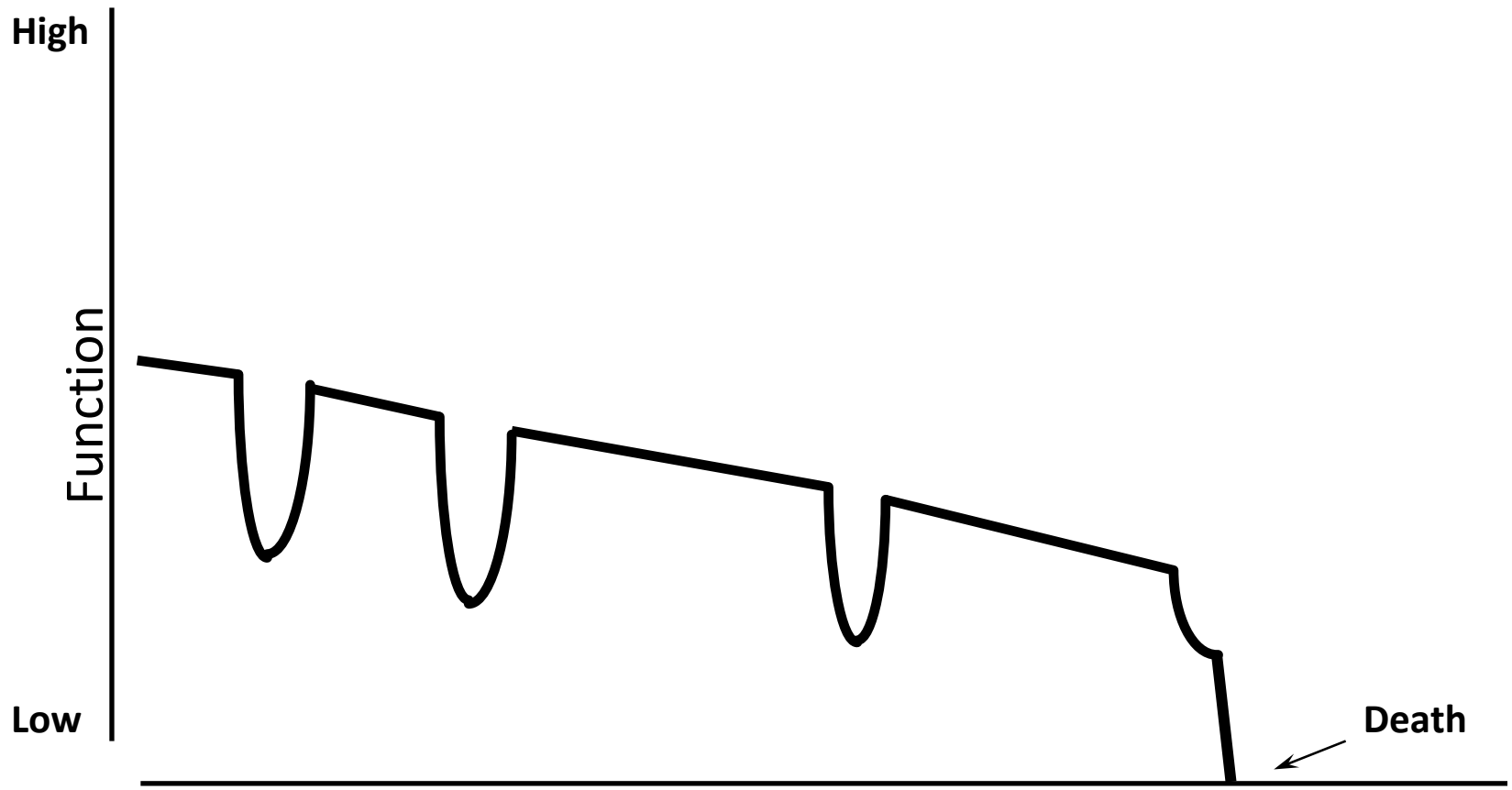
*Places all costs of normal reproduction with the babies. Includes long-term care costs.

- Estimates are medians of estimates of a sample of physicians and policy researchers, except for the last decile
- The last decile's estimate are derived from Lubitz et al 1995 and from MedPAC report 2000.

“Cancer” Trajectory, Diagnosis to Death



“Organ System Failure” Trajectory

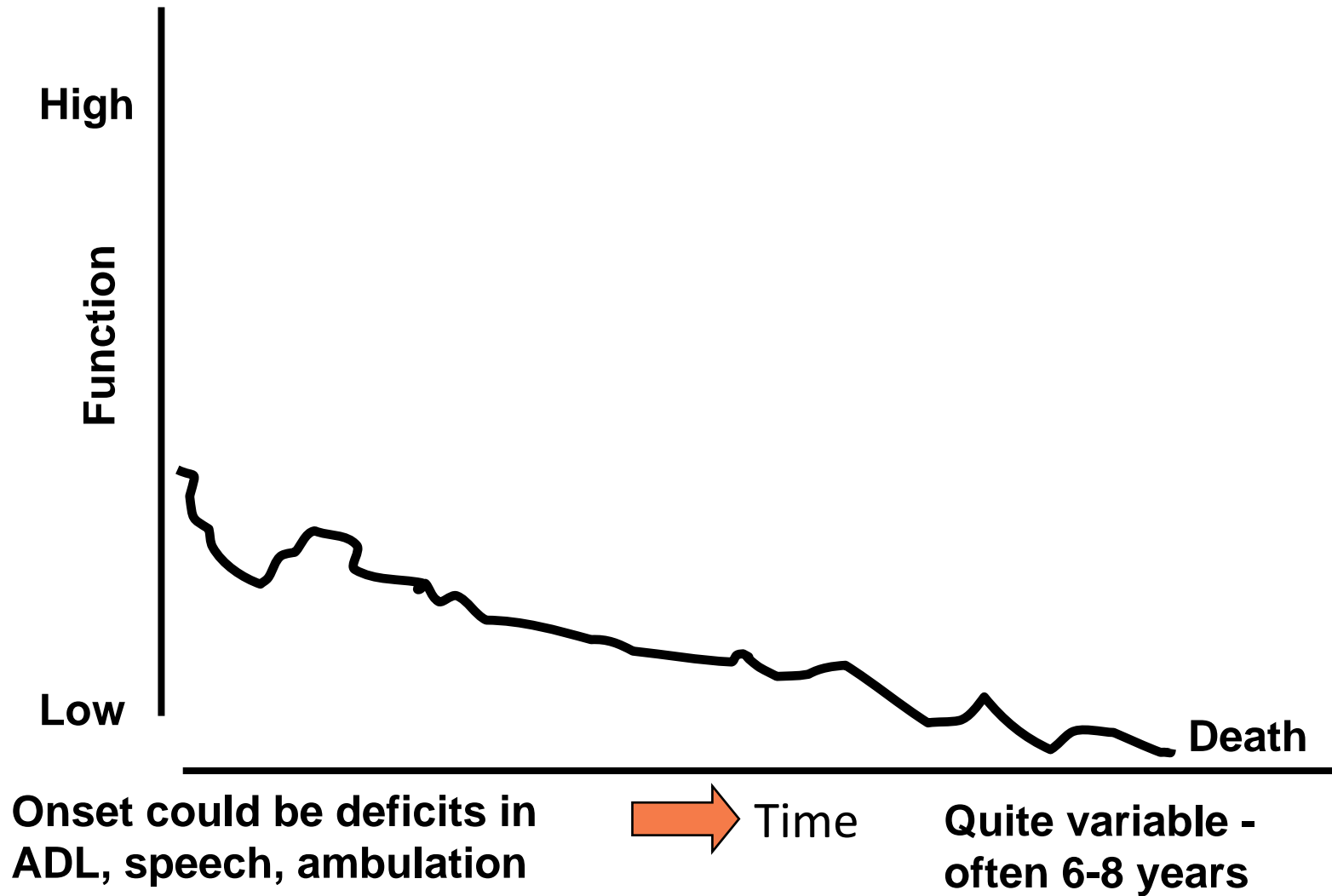


Begin to use hospital
often, self-care becomes
difficult



~ 2-5 years, but death seems
“sudden”

“Frailty/Dementia” Trajectory



Managing a Hotel Chain....

- Would you build just one kind of hotel?
- Would you wait to design the hotel until a sleepy person showed up looking for a room?
- *No* – you would design hotels around the priorities of the most common populations, then customize for individuals as needed
- Mass customization and market segmentation!
- **We can use these strategies for health care**

The Bridges to Health Model

| POPULATION | PRIORITIES |
|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Healthy | Stay well |
| 2. Maternal, infant | Safe start |
| 3. Acutely ill | Get well |
| 4. Chronic condition | Slow progression |
| 5. Stable, disabled | Life opportunities |
| 6. EOL, short “dying” | Comfort, Control |
| 7. EOL, erratic | Few episodes, plan |
| 8. EOL, long decline | Personal care, family |

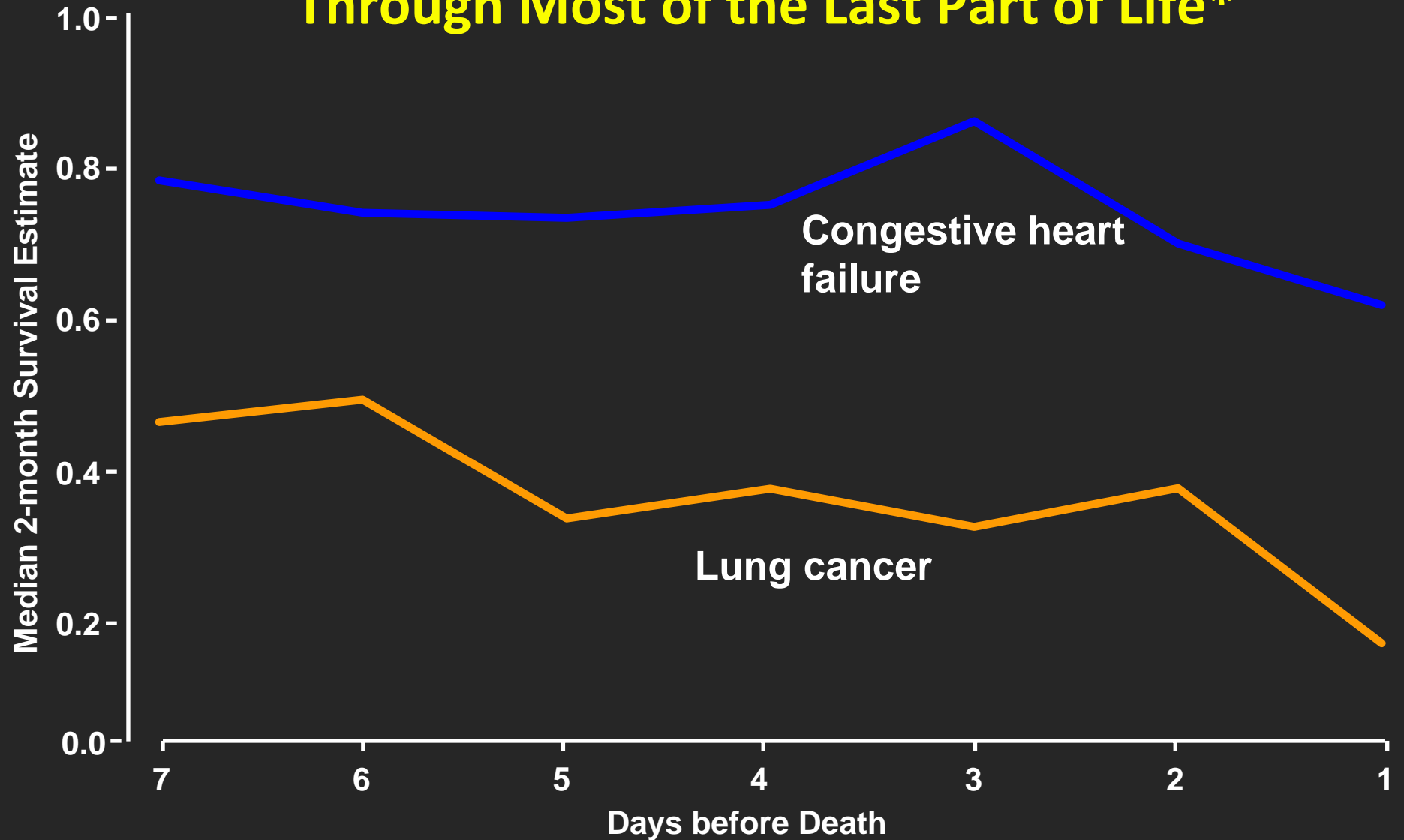
Who is in the Category “End of Life?”

NOT “reliably short prognosis” (e.g., < 6 months)
because

- most people are stable
- with serious illness
- within a week or two of their deaths –

For example – the average person dying of heart failure has 50-50 chance to live 6 months, 2 days before death

Prognosis Stays Uncertain Through Most of the Last Part of Life*



* From SUPPORT, 1988-93

Who Should we Categorize as “End of Life?”

Better answer -

- ✓ Seriously ill and disabled
- ✓ With condition(s) that will not substantially improve,
- ✓ Will worsen,
- ✓ And will cause death.

(No particular survival time is part of the definition)

The “No Surprise” Population

Would it be a surprise for this person to die within six months? (or a year – doesn't matter)

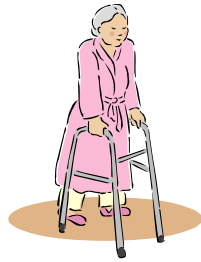
If “no surprise” – then “end of life” care

- Priorities: planning ahead, comfort, family
- Optimal medical care
- Can continue for a few years
- Includes the short time when dying soon

The Pool of Family Caregivers

1990

11 to 1



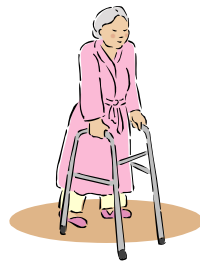
2010

10 to 1



2030

6 to 1



2050

4 to 1



How the US supports caregivers...

- No assessment of capability or willingness
- Little engagement or respect
- No regular income support
- No dependable respite care or back-up for absences
- Unreliable training and support
- Frequent ruin of caregiver retirement security
- Almost no research

YET – almost all of us will be caregivers

What is working

- Wider availability of hospice, palliative care, geriatrics – symptom care and planning
- Geographically-anchored reforms, system CQI
- ID and learn from “positive deviants”
- Normalizing honesty and planning
- Transition reduction and coaching or bridging
- Feedback from patients, families, downstream providers
- Transparency, measurement, standards

What else could work

1. Tell patient/family stories. Create awareness and preferences.
2. Organize political power when high-cost treatments and caregiver shortages create opportunities.
3. Enable regional improvement work.
4. Build capacity for optimal care - honoring choices is a hollow victory if you have no good options!
5. Label ordinary dysfunctions as serious errors:
 - a. Avoidable hospitalizations,
 - b. Not planning ahead,
 - c. Manipulating patients/families with incomplete information,
 - d. Inept transitions,
 - e. Poor symptom control

For example, The Goldilocks Paradigm

- Some people are too well for hospitals
(they are put at risk for little gain)
- Some people are too sick for hospitals
(they are put at risk for little gain)
- Some people are *just right*....

The trick is to hospitalize only the Just Right!

How?...

Keep the “Too Sick” out of hospitals

- Good support in the community
 - Quick
 - Reliable
 - Can handle most symptoms and situations
 - Including respiratory distress
 - Cope with poor housing, caregiver limits
- Advance planning
 - Especially during earlier hospitalizations
 - Plan must be available
 - Full plan of care – not just CPR

An especially sensitive issue....

How can anyone know that the patient's dying was actually timely?

(appropriate diagnosis and treatment – and not death from inattention, denial of treatment, or deliberate cause)

Possible Answers

- Standards about diagnosis and severity
- Standards about choice and planning
- Autopsies
- Reporting concerns, threats to safety

Why Bother?

- Suffering (unnecessarily severe)
- Costs (unnecessarily high)
- Track record of successful improvements
- Unpopularity of status quo

So – we might have the political will to reduce suffering, improve care and reduce costs

Why Bother?

It was my father this time,
but next time it will be your father, and
then you, and then your child.

I have heard it said by cynics that the
quality of medical care would be far
better and the hazards far less if
physicians, like pilots, were passengers in
their own airplanes.

We are.