**News Release**

This is an ACP Day News Release that is written in a way to be used as is by media. It uses a composite story to help illustrate the 2019 theme of How well do you know me? Send it out with the Media Advisory and an ACP photograph to support the story – the BCCPC can help you with this.

#### April 16 is national Advance Care Planning Day

# When a What If… conversation becomes a gift to honour

Sophie Leung\* is in tears.

She’s been at her mom’s door knocking away, but no one is answering. She calls. She texts. Nothing.

Sophie doesn’t have a key anymore. She left home years earlier and moved to another city. She’s looking forward to a planned but long overdue visit with her widowed mom, Faye Leung, and catching up with her older brother, Wayne, who lives nearby.

Sophie knocks louder and harder. Still no answer. She tries Wayne’s cell. No answer. She knows he’s at a business conference and won’t show up for a few days yet.

She walks around to the back porch and peers inside through an open curtain.

And that’s when shock hits – she sees her mom lying on the kitchen floor, a small pool of blood around her head. Sophia struggles to catch her breath, and then goes into automatic mode dialing 911 for help.

The rest is a blur. Police and ambulance arrive. At emergency, Faye is whisked away by a trauma team, and Sophie is left alone to wait.

Her mother has been ill for a long time – living with MS (multiple sclerosis) for many years, though she’d heard from her brother that it had gotten progressively worse with major difficulty moving arms and legs, and significant balance issues.

Eventually, a doctor comes out. The news is not good. Her 74-year-old mother must have stumbled and fell, and hit her head. She’s unconscious and not responding.

Sophie authorizes any and all interventions available to save her mom’s life. The world is reduced to the waiting room and the emergency bed where Faye Leung lies, breathing tubes and medical lines everywhere.

A couple hours later Sophie finally gets a hold of Wayne, and he’s on the first available flight back. Many hours later he joins her.

Sophie tells her brother that she’s doing everything she can to keep their mother alive, to get medicine into her, to keep the breathing apparatus going.

Though Wayne’s jetlagged and tired, he holds his sister tight and suggests they go for a walk.

He tells her how hard the last year has been for their mom. He calls her nightly and visits four times a week. He’s been bringing food over and helping out around the house. He’s arranged for extra support people to come in. Her MS has worsened, he says, and she’s been having difficulty with what used to be simple chores.

**The Value of Conversations**

And then Wayne reveals that he and their mom have had the “What if” conversation ... what if she’s taken seriously ill and can’t communicate; what if she ends up in hospital; what if…

He knows -- because she’s shared with him over dinners and while watching TV together -- that if anything were to happen to her, she wouldn’t want to have breathing or feeding tubes; she wanted him to know that she would prefer to let her life end peacefully.

It’s not what Sophie expects. But then she realizes that her mom had shared her wishes, her wants, and her values with Wayne. Their mother’s wishes are not what Sophie thought.

Sophie holds onto Wayne and cries. They walk back to the hospital hand in hand, and speak to the doctor about Faye’s wishes. Three days later, Faye Leung slips away in her sleep with Sophie and Wayne by her side.

Even in that time of sadness and grief, Sophie feels grateful that her mom had talked with her brother about her wishes, for her brother’s strength, her brother’s ability to make the decision honouring their mother’s wishes, and her mother’s gift in letting her wishes be known.

#### Advance Care Planning

April 16 marks Advance Care Planning Day across North America.

Advance Care Planninginvolves talking with others about your wishes for your future health care, and deciding who speaks on your behalf if you cannot.

“When it comes to a health crisis, you may think those close to you know what *you* want. But do they? Find out with a *How Well Do You Know Me* conversation,” says Dr. Eman Hassan, Director of Public Health Initiatives of the BC Centre for Palliative Care. “Advance Care Planning conversations are a gift to the people close to you who can support and honour your health-care wishes – like what Faye Leung shared with her son Wayne. This way, in a time of health crisis, if you’re able to communicate, you will make your own health-care decisions; but if you cannot communicate, they already know your wishes.”

Resources and tools to help start Advance Care Planning conversations are available at www.bc-cpc.ca/acp. [REPLACE WITH YOUR LOCAL ORGANIZATIONAL RESOURCE INFORMATION]

*\*All the names and events in this story are composites to help illustrate how having a “How well do you know me?” conversation well in advance of a health crisis is part of and a benefit to Advance Care Planning.*

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### *Story byline: by Ariela Friedmann: Communications Consultant*

### *ACP Day Photograph available by request via BCCPC; contact Kathy Kennedy:* *kkennedy@bc-cpc.ca*