

## **Patients Have a Right to Know the Truth**

By Jim Stinson, Consultant on Older Adult Ministries

It happened again! I've written about it before and, I suspect, will do so again. It began with a phone call from a distressed husband. He had just heard from the doctor that his wife, who has multiple health issues, has cancer that has spread throughout much of her body. The doctor wants to arrange a meeting with him and his wife to discuss treatment plans. "I'm not sure I want her to know? Do I take her with me or do I speak to the doctor alone? If she goes with me, do I ask the hard questions in front of her?"

I understood the concern he had. Out of love, he wanted to spare his wife some devastating news for fear that it would only upset her. No doubt the news will upset her. After hearing him out, I affirmed his concern, but said that I had difficulty with the word "only." "Is there not the strong possibility that she already senses the diagnosis, that she might be more upset if you withhold information from her, and that she will come to doubt your honesty in the days and months to follow as more questions and concerns arise?"

Patients have an absolute right to know what they are facing. How else can they make informed decisions about the choices before them? How else can they have any "control" over a situation that leaves them feeling helpless? How else can they make peace with their situation, if they are not certain what their situation actually is?

From the standpoint of a faithful Christian witness, how can we be witness to a resurrection faith while we run and hide from the reality of dying? We've a story to tell to the nations. How can we tell it if we see death as unmentionable? How can we tell people that the darkness shall turn to dawning, and the dawning to noonday bright if we don't acknowledge the darkness?

"Do I take her with me or do I speak to the doctor alone?" The Christian knows that the truth—any truth—will set us free. Of course you take her with you! Who better, than the one she loves and trusts the most, to help her with the news, and to help her claim her faith in the darkness?