The Wendt Character Initiative and Nursing Care at the End of Life  
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Below is a list of films that are currently in the Charles C. Myers Library that pertain to the End of Life. Some of these films can be utilized for use in any classroom setting that is discussing the Ethical principles of: The Golden Rule, Fairness, Honesty, and Truthfulness.  

This list of films is in development and is not all inclusive as there is other films currently on order and as other films become available they too will be purchased for this library collection.  

While I have not been able to view all of these films, of the ones that I have viewed I have provided a rating scale (see below) and brief description of how these films could be utilized in the classroom.  

A final note of THANKS needs to be addressed to Anne-Marie Gruber for all of her help in compiling this current list of films and for her assistance in ordering and referencing these films in the library.  

Rating Scale:  
***** Excellent  
**** Good  
*** Fair  
** Poor  
* Very Poor  
N/V Not Viewed  

Angels in America. 2004  
Set in 1985. Revolves around two very different men with AIDS, one fictional, one fictionalized. Roy Cohn, personifies all the hypocrisy, delusion and callousness of the official response to the plague. Nothing shakes Roy's lack of empathy: even on his death bed, he's fighting with his gay nurse and taunting the woman he helped put to death, Ethel Rosenberg. The other patient is Prior Walter, who is visited by an angel and deserted by his self-pitying lover, Louis. Louis moves on to a relationship with Joe Pitt, a Mormon lawyer whose closeted homosexuality drives his wife to delusions and brings his mother to New York.  

At A Loss for Words. 1997  N/V
How to help those you care about during a miscarriage, stillbirth or newborn death experience. Helps teach spouses, family members, friends, neighbors or anyone involved in early care of an infant on how to help and what to say and do.
Media BF 575 .G7 A82 1997 VHS

Beaches. 1988  ****
Two childhood friends are reunited in their middle age and one learns she is dying of a fatal disease.
This film could be assigned for students to view individually and then write a reflection paper on.
Media PN 1997 .B42 2002 DVD

The Hospital. 1971  *Wendt  N/V
Satirical look at a large metropolitan hospital where the patients die of neglect, the interns chase the nurses, the head of the hospital contemplates suicide and there's someone killing off the staff.

The Hours. 2002  N/V
In 1929, Virginia Woolf is starting to write her novel, 'Mrs. Dalloway,' under the care of doctors and family. In 1951, Laura Brown is planning for her husband's birthday, but is preoccupied with reading Woolf's novel. In 2001, Clarrisa Vaughn is planning an award party for her friend, an author dying of AIDS. Taking place over one day, all three stories are interconnected with the novel: one is writing it, one is reading it, and one is living it.

John Quincy Archibald's son Michael collapses while playing baseball as a result of heart failure. John rushes Michael to a hospital emergency room where he is informed that Michael's only hope is a transplant. Unfortunately, John's insurance won't cover his son's transplant. Out of options, John Q. takes the emergency room staff and patients hostage until hospital doctors agree to do the transplant.
This film could be shown as a group for group discussion or as an individual project in which the student could write a reflection paper on. This film covers addresses the ethical issues of The Golden Rule and Fairness.

Life as a House. 2001  ***
When a man is diagnosed with terminal cancer, he takes custody of his misanthropic teenage son, for whom quality time means getting high, engaging in small-time prostitution, and avoiding his father.
This film could be assigned for students to view individually and then write a reflection paper on.
Media PN 1997 .M95 2002 DVD
Lorenzo's Oil. 1992 N/V
A boy develops a disease so rare that nobody is working on a cure, so his father decides to learn about it and tackle the problem himself.
Media PN 1997 .L6815 2004 DVD

Marvin's Room. 1997 N/V
A dysfunctional family takes a journey of self-discovery and reconciliation and learns to reach out to one another.

Morrie Schwartz: Lessons on Living. 1996 N/V
A special presentation broadcast after his death, of three interviews with Morrie Schwartz, a retired sociology professor from Brandeis University. The programs originally broadcast on ABC News Nightline focused on Mr. Schwartz's attitude and stamina with the process of dying from ALS, popularly known as Lou Gehrig's disease.

On our Own Terms: Moyers on Dying. (4-part series) 2005
Part 1: Living with Dying. 2000 ****
Death, which sooner or later comes to all, is treated as a strangely taboo subject in America. In this program, Bill Moyers describes the search for new ways of thinking--and talking--about dying. Forgoing the usual reluctance that most Americans show toward speaking about death, patients and medical professionals alike come forward to examine the end of life with honesty, courage, and even humor, demonstrating that dying can be an incredibly rich experience for both the terminally ill and their loved ones.
This film could be shown as a group for group discussion or as an individual project in which the student could write a reflection paper on.
Media R 726.8 .M68 L58 2005 DVD

Part 2: A Different Kind of Care. 2005 *****
At the end of life, what many Americans want is physical and spiritual comfort in a home setting. Bill Moyers presents the important strides being made in the area of palliative care pioneering institutions such as New York's Mt. Sinai Medical Center and Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center. These advances are bringing peace to those who fear that they will be a burden to loved ones, will suffer needlessly, or will be abandoned in their hour of greatest need.
This film could be shown as a group for group discussion or as an individual project in which the student could write a reflection paper on. Many ethical issues are addressed in this film.
Media R 726.8 .M68 D54 2005 DVD
Part 3: A Death of One’s Own. 2005  *****
More and more Americans are looking for opportunities to exert some measure of control over where and how they die. In this program, Bill Moyers unravels the complexities underlying the many choices at the end of life, including the bitter debate over physician-assisted suicide. Three patients, their families and their doctors discuss some of the hardest decisions, including how to pay for care, what constitutes humane treatment, and how to balance dying and dignity. In the end, do these patients die the way they wanted? Yes...and no.

This film could be shown as a group for group discussion or as an individual project in which the student could write a reflection paper on.

Media R 726.8 .M68 D43 2005 DVD

Part 4: A Time to Change. 2005  N/V
Whether they want to or not, four out of five Americans will likely die in hospitals or nursing homes and the care they get will depend on who is footing the bill. Bill Moyers introduces crusading medical professionals--including staff members of the Balm of Gilead Project in Birmingham, Alabama--who have dedicated themselves to improving end-of-life care by changing America's overburdened health system.

Media R 726.8 .M68 T56 2005 DVD

Ordinary People. 1980. *Wendt  N/V
The accidental death of the older son of an affluent family deeply strains the relationships among the bitter mother, the good-natured father, and the guilt-ridden younger son.

Media PN 1997 .O69 2001 DVD

Patch Adams. 1998  *****
Fact-based story of Hunter "Patch" Adams (Robin Williams), the founder of the Gesundheit Clinic, a clinic which deals with their patients with humor and pathos. The film starts with Hunter admitting himself as a patient in a mental ward. While there, he found he enjoyed helping the other patients and found the staff to be cold and separative from the patients. Vowing to change things, he releases himself from the hospital and headed to the Virginia Medical College. His unorthodox methods cast him up against many of the doctors and deans of the university, despite him getting some of the highest grades in his class. Recognizing that many poor people were not being treated, as a student he formed the Gesundheit Clinic to aid those who were not getting proper treatment at the hospital. However, this brought him up before the Medical Review Board for practicing without a license.

This film could be shown as a group for group discussion. Many ethical issues are addressed in this film.

Media PN 1997 .P36 1999 DVD
Pioneers of Hospice: Changing the Face of Dying. 2004 ****
Discusses how end-of-life care has been dramatically transformed through Interviews with Dame Cicely Saunders, Florence Wald, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, and Balfour Mount, pioneers of the modern hospice movement.
This film could be shown as a group for group discussion.
Media R 726.8 .P563 2004 DVD

The daughter of a brilliant but mentally disturbed mathematician (recently deceased) tries to come to grips with her possible inheritance: his insanity. Complicating matters are one of her father's ex-students who want to search through his papers and her estranged sister who shows up to help settle his affairs.
Media PN 1997.2 .P7664 2006 DVD

Terms of Endearment. 1983 *****
Larry McMurtry's novel becomes a somewhat lumpy film as directed by James L. Brooks (As Good As It Gets). Nevertheless, it is entirely winning, with Shirley MacLaine and Debra Winger playing a combative mother and daughter who see each other through various ups and downs in love and loss, and most especially through a terminal illness endured by Winger's character. Jack Nicholson deservedly won an Oscar for his supporting role as a free-spirited astronaut who backs away from a romance with MacLaine and then returns in the clutch. As he always does, Brooks keeps things from getting too soapy with his intense concentration on the soulful evolution of his characters.
This film could be shown as a group for group discussion. Many ethical issues are addressed in this film.
Media PN 1997 .T47 2000 DVD

The Hospital. 1971 N/V
Paddy Chayefsky (Marty) wrote the script for this 1971 film that mixes--in Chayefsky tradition--absurdist satire with a touching, almost wistful love story. George C. Scott plays a cynical doctor battling bureaucratic superstructures on the one hand and hippie-dippy flakiness among some patients on the other. When he falls for an eccentric young woman (Diana Rigg) with an alternative view on everything, the road to liberation from burdensome responsibilities seems to open before him. Director Arthur Hiller (Love Story) doesn't do much more than bring the screenplay to life, though he does create a persuasive sense of urban chaos in the setting. Scott gives a good, thoughtful performance.

The Sea Inside/ Mar Adentro. 2005 N/V
Biography of Spaniard Ramón Sampedro, who fought a 30-year campaign to win the right to end his life.
Media RC 406 .Q33 M37 2005 DVD
Steel Magnolias. 1989     ****
Based on Robert Harling's play, this comedy-drama directed by Herbert Ross (The Turning Point) follows several years in the lives of women who regularly see one another at a beauty shop in their small Louisiana town. The story deepens as Julia Roberts, playing a serious diabetic and the daughter of Sally Field, goes downhill in her health. But as an ensemble piece, this is one of those enjoyably lumpy tearjerkers with many years' worth of stored truths suddenly being shared between the characters, lots of grievances aired, that sort of thing. Daryl Hannah and Shirley MacLaine assume the most eccentric roles, Dolly Parton the most fun, and Olympia Dukakis the most dignified, while Sally Field essentially provides the moral and emotional center of the movie. **This film could be shown as a group for group discussion or as an individual project in which the student could write a reflection paper on. Many ethical issues are addressed in this film.**

*Media PN 1997.S84 2000 DVD*

Whose Death Is It Anyway? Tough Choices for the End of Life. 2005     N/V
Emphasizes the importance of personal involvement in decisions about one's care at the end of life. Highlighting the types of treatment many people receive, it realistically explores the difficulties surrounding end-of-life decision making through five documentary segments that feature families sharing their own discussions and experiences.

*Media R 726 .W56 1996*

Wit. 2001. *Wendt     *****
Based on the Margaret Edson play, Vivian Bearing is a literal, hardnosed English professor who has been diagnosed with terminal ovarian cancer. During the story, she reflects on her reactions to the cycle the cancer takes, the treatments, and significant events in her life. The people that watch over her are Jason Posner, who only finds faith in being a doctor; Susie Monahan, a nurse with a human side that is the only one in the hospital that cares for Vivian's condition; and Dr. Kelekian, the head doctor who just wants results no matter what they are. **This film could be shown as a group for group discussion. Many ethical issues are addressed in this film.**

*Media PS 3555 .D48 W58 2001 DVD*

Last updated 27 November 2007. Synopses from movie cases or Amazon unless otherwise noted.

The following guide has proved useful in using films in the classroom: