

Life After Stroke: Conversations with Couples A Film Screening and Discussion

Thomas Cole, PhD

*Director of the McGovern Center for Health, Humanities and the Human Spirit at the
University of Texas Health Science Center in Houston*

Professor of Humanities in the Department of Religious Studies at Rice University

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12:00 noon – 1:30 pm

Neurology Auditorium

Neurological Institute of New York

710 West 168th Street

New York, NY 10032

This event was co-sponsored with The National Aphasia Association and the Columbia University Programs in Occupational Therapy

In her opening remarks, Dr. Ruth L. Fischbach, Director of the Columbia University Center for Bioethics, noted that stroke is the third-leading cause of death in the United States, after heart attacks and cancer, with more than 700,000 persons experiencing a brain attack every year, approximately one individual every 45 seconds, and that stroke causes more serious long-term disabilities than any other disease. For many of those who survive their stroke, rehabilitation is a critical part of recovery. The survivor must change, relearn, or redefine how to live as well as carry out the activities of daily life.

Dr. Cole introduced *Living After Stroke: Conversations With Couples*, by saying that the documentary video's genesis was in a study that Dr. Sharon K. Ostwald, Professor in Gerontological Nursing at the University of Texas at Houston, was conducting with stroke survivors as part of *The CARES Study* on post-stroke rehabilitation. The video recounts the struggles of six couples with the consequences of stroke in their lives between one and four years after the event. It is an honest and intimate look at the issues that couples face as they work to recover after a stroke and maintain their relationships.

Before showing the video, Dr. Cole asked that clinicians put down their clinical gaze, and scientists put away their scientific method. He asked them to “just be people for half an hour,” and respond on a personal level to the film. Indeed, he said, he wanted the viewers to be uncomfortable, and deal with their discomfort, just as the stroke survivors were forced to do with the drastically changed circumstances of their own lives.

Following the showing of the 26-minute film, Dr. Cole responded to the many questions from the audience about care-giving and chronic illness, pastoral care, and the grieving process. More than one audience member noted that there did not exist for stroke survivors the same support system there is for cancer patients; Dr. Cole responded that the film was an attempt to fill that void. Another individual remarked on what she termed the survivors' “invisibility,” particularly given their large population, observing that people are often uncomfortable with them and the intimations of implications for their own lives. It was also noted that the couples interviewed were “extremely articulate” about their struggles.

Living After Stroke: Conversations With Couples would be an invaluable resource for healthcare students and professionals caring for these patients in the acute care setting.