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CHAMPIONS IN HEALTH CARE

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'Engage' takes important step to advance difficult decisions



Alexandra Drane
Co-founder, Engage with Grace

CHAMPION
COMMUNITY OUTREACH



W. MARC BERNSAU | BUSINESS JOURNAL

Eliza Corp. President Alexandra Drane teamed with Matthew Holt to launch an online support system for people dealing death-related decisions.

Effort aims to assist families, loved ones in death discussions

BY TODD LARSON
SPECIAL TO THE JOURNAL

A summer 2008 cocktail conversation over a common conundrum — the end-of-life issues they both had to face when they lost loved ones — prompted **Alexandra Drane** and **Matthew Holt** to launch **Engage with Grace**, a nonprofit movement with a Web site that would engage others in death-decision dialogue as well as a means of mitigating end-of-life grief and confusion through contemplation and conversation.

The site, www.engagewithgrace.com, enables visitors to ponder and express the type of care they or their loved ones would like to receive at end of life by answering "The One Slide," a downloadable slide of five questions on whether to receive medical intervention, whether to die at home or in a hospital, how well a loved one could

describe the treatment he or she wants if terminally ill, and whether a living will, an advanced directive and the appointment of a personal advocate and a health-care power of attorney have been completed.

"About 70 percent of people want to die at home, and only about 30 percent get to. Why? Because wishes aren't communicated, and even if they are, often they are not respected," said Drane, who is president of **Eliza Corp.**,

a Beverly-based developer of speech recognition software applications that facilitate communication of health care needs. "The system just takes over, and most of us feel powerless to stop it, no matter how opinionated or strong-willed we usually are.

"We came up with this notion of putting on just one piece of paper just five questions that people could answer for themselves and for their loved ones that would help get this conversation

started. They would then spread the word to family, to their book group, to their colleagues, to anyone and everyone, really."

Drane's sister-in-law, Rosaria "Za" Vandenberg, succumbed to Stage 4 glioblastoma at 32.

Holt, the co-founder of **Health2.0**, a San Francisco, Calif.-based health care conference organizer and blog network, lost his grandmother to Alzheimer's disease, and his mother died suddenly at 47.

"Since launching Engage with Grace in October of 2008, we've seen an incredible outpouring of support," said Drane. "It turns out that this is something people really do want to talk about, given the opening."

It gave her an opening, too — an expansion of her mission when Engage with Grace inspired **Beth Israel Deaconess Hospital CEO Paul Levy** to start a blog rally on end-of-life.

"Thanks to Paul's idea, the first recorded use of a blog rally that we know of occurred over Thanksgiving week-end of 2008, in support of Engage with Grace," said Drane.

More than 100 blogs participated from local outlets such as WBUR and Boston.com to national media including The Wall Street Journal.

"It's all about making sure that we all end our lives with the way we have lived them — with intent," Drane said.