

# The Pop Culture CELA: “Doctor Sleep”

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As Fall quickly approaches, we can anticipate some of our favorite Autumnal traditions and experiences; football, cool weather, pumpkin everything, and.....scary movies. Horror films are every bit as important to Autumn as foliage, in my humble opinion. I trade the tentpole features of the summer for spookier, more macabre films. I find that, while the thrill of these movies is certainly the main draw, Horror films also provide an unlikely backdrop for nuance, social commentary, and the human experience. These concepts are on full display in movies written/directed by visionaries such as: John Carpenter, Wes Craven, and Pittsburgh’s very own George Romero. While these names are synonymous with terror, one name stands above all others in American Horror: Stephen King. Author of over 60 novels, King defines the mood and voice of modern American Horror. Of these novels, numerous movie adaptations ranging from the campy popcorn flick “Silver Bullet” to the genre defining classic “The Shining” have been made.

While Stanley Kubrick’s “The Shining” will always be remembered as one of the greatest achievements in filmmaking, it will also be remembered as the adaptation of one of his books King hated the most. Being an auteur himself, Kubrick took many liberties with King’s novel in ways that simultaneously served his film while irrevocably altering its source material. This, along with his affection toward Danny Torrence (the psychically gifted son of Jack “Here’s Johnny!” Torrence), may have served as the primary reason King decided to write “Doctor Sleep”. “Doctor Sleep” follows the story of an adult Danny Torrence as he navigates sobriety, his childhood trauma, and his work as a hospice nurse. Danny has found that his gift can be used positively to help comfort the sick and dying. It all seems to be going uncharacteristically well for Danny when, all of a sudden, he is drawn back into the world of the supernatural. Through a series of psychic communications, Danny connects with another gifted individual who then becomes the target of a nomadic tribe of psychic vampires (it is a Stephen King yarn after all...). I will avoid spoiling anything by stopping the synopsis here. Suffice it to say, the book was a major page-turner and it was only a matter of time before the adaptation followed.

Director Mike Flanagan’s Doctor Sleep brought King’s novel to the big screen in 2019. Ewan McGregor brings his signature gravitas, charm, and humor to his portrayal of Danny Torrence against Rebecca Ferguson’s chilling turn as “Rose the Hat”, the leader of the aforementioned psychic vampires. Everything you could ask for from a Stephen King movie is on display here: a compelling story, scares, complete characters, and concrete humanity at its center. Despite all of the horrifying and fantastical events of Doctor Sleep, this is truly a story about an individual’s path to recovery and redemption through helping others. This is why I found Danny’s chosen profession as a Hospice Nurse to be so absolutely compelling.

Hospice, to finally tie this to Elder Law/Advocacy, is a type of health care that focuses on palliation of a terminally ill patient's pain and symptoms and attending to their emotional and spiritual needs at the end of life. While there is a certain trepidation and stigma to this style of treatment, Hospice is a necessary and incredibly important facet of aging and Elder Advocacy.

Be afraid of scary movies! Do not be afraid of Hospice!

A common misconception of Hospice is that a patient gets less care because of their terminal diagnosis. This is not true. Patients who enroll in Hospice will benefit from a palliative plan of care that is implemented by a professional and compassionate clinical team whose primary goal is to provide comfort, dignity and quality of life through end of life. Hospice care can be provided at home, in a personal care home or a nursing home. Hospice collaborates with caregivers at home or nursing staff in a facility to meet the physical and psychosocial needs of a patient. Therefore, Hospice is actually more support. In addition to the clinical benefits of Hospice, there is a financial benefit. Hospice care is covered under Medicare. Hospice should not be viewed as a terrifying death sentence. It is a gift for patients with a life limiting condition who choose comfort and quality of life over aggressive treatment that may be futile. So don't let Hospice scare you.

In the immediate case, in light of this analysis, I can't think of a more apropos and brilliant profession for King to assign to Torrence than this. From a paranormal standpoint, Danny's psychic talents equip him to be an almost superhuman Hospice Nurse. More importantly though, Danny's life experience provides him with the empathy and desire to help soothe and comfort those who are beyond earthly help. While the events of the story are beyond outlandish, this story helps to remove the stigma of Hospice by portraying it in a heroic light.

In summation, Hospice is an invaluable component to an individual's healthcare journey. Despite any connotations/stigma surrounding this style of care, there is vital utility in accessing Hospice. This concept is very poignantly portrayed in Stephen King's "Doctor Sleep".