



## End of Life Management

### Preparing for Death

The end of life cannot be predicted for any of us. We do not know when it will happen, who will be with us, how it will occur or what we will feel. However, we do know some useful things about how many people die and this can help put your situation into perspective.

There are certain physical signs that alert us that the end of life may be growing close. In the final weeks of life many people become very weak. They are drowsy and sometimes sleeping most of the day and night. They have a decreased appetite and thirst with an inability or unwillingness to eat food. They frequently have difficulty swallowing fluids. They may be less able or willing to talk or concentrate. **It is reassuring at this time for the person and his or her family and caregivers know everything reasonable is being done to ensure patient comfort including wise and judicious use of medications.** This helps the person to accept and find peace with dying. However, not every warning sign is physical.

### Signs and Symptoms of Approaching Death

As death nears, the patient may:

- Sleep more.
- Speak to people not present.
- Talk about leaving or taking a trip or journey.
- Withdraw from people or have little to say.
- Eat or drink less.
- Have trouble swallowing.
- Become more confused.
- Make moaning sounds.



- Lose control of urination and bowel movements.
- Have moist breathing or sound congested.
- Have changes in the pattern of breathing such as long periods without breathing followed by several quick, deep breaths.
- Have blurred vision.
- Not hear as well as usual.
- Have less pain.
- Have cool feeling hands and arms or feet and legs.
- Turn blue around nose, mouth, fingers, toes.

**What should you report to the Hospice / Palliative Care Team?**

- Changes in the patient such as:
  - Restlessness or anxiety.
  - Changes in breathing.
  - Pain or discomfort.
- Need for spiritual support or guidance for the patient or family.
- Concerns that may need help from the social worker, chaplain or other members of the hospice team.



- Religious, cultural or ethnic traditions important to your family.
- At the time of death, the hospice team will want to know:
  - Name of the funeral home you want to use.
  - Whether the body will be embalmed or cremated.
  - Names of family members to be contacted.

### **What can be done?**

***The team will work with you to relieve symptoms and increase comfort.***

Comfort for the patient and for your family is the goal of the hospice / palliative care team.

Things you can do:

- Allow the patient to sleep as much as they wish.
- Include the children in your family in the experience of the patient's death.
- Turn the patient if it makes him or her more comfortable.
- Moisten the patient's mouth with a moist washcloth or cotton ball.
- If the patient has a fever or is hot, apply a cool rag to the forehead.
- Give medications ordered by the doctor to decrease anxiety, restlessness, agitation or moist breathing.
- Write down what the patient says. Such messages may comfort you later.
- Continue to talk clearly to the patient and say the things you need or want to say. Remember that the patient may be able to hear even when not able to respond.
- Keep a light on in the room. The patient cannot see well and may be scared by darkness and shadows.
- Play the patient's favorite music softly.
- Encourage visitors to talk directly to the patient and tell the patient who they are.
- Keep things calm around the patient.
- Open a window or use a fan in the room if the patient is having trouble breathing.
- Continue to touch and stay close to your loved one.

### **Signs of Death**

- There is no breathing.
- There is no heartbeat.
- There is a loss of control of bladder and bowel.
- There is no response to voice and touch.
- The eyelids are slightly open.
- The eyes are fixed on a specific spot.
- The jaw is relaxed, and the mouth is slightly open.