Recognising Dying

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Aims

• To recognise the dying process
• To provide individualised care in the last hours of life
• To be able to support the family and carers of the dying patient
• To provide care before and after death that has a positive effect on grieving
Objectives

• To be able to recognise the key features of the dying phase.
• To develop an understanding of the symptoms which may be experienced during the last days of life.
• To explore the issues faced by families and carers.
Where do you think most people die?

- 53% in NHS hospitals
- 21% at home
- 18% in care homes
- 5% in hospices

Half a million deaths
## End of Life Care Strategy

### What is a Good Death?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Treated as an individual with dignity &amp; respect</th>
<th>Being without pain &amp; other symptoms</th>
<th>In familiar surroundings with close family/friends</th>
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Consider Reversible causes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reversible Causes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hypercalcaemia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infection</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medication changes</td>
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</tbody>
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Dying phase – last 1-3 months

- Increased sleepiness, fatigue
- Increasing symptoms (pain, breathless, N&V)
- Anorexia/weight loss.
- Dehydration
- Less communicative/interactive
- Reduced mobility
Dying phase - last 1-2 weeks

• Reduced bladder/bowel function – urinary retention, incontinence.
• Person appears more gaunt, pale.
• Withdrawal from family, friends and life.
• Spending most of the time in bed.
• Difficulty swallowing and taking oral medications.
• Confusion/disorientation/visions.
Actively dying phase
(Last days or hours)

• Semi-conscious/Unconscious
• Pulse and heart beat may be irregular or difficult to detect
• Restlessness/agitation/plucking
• Increased perspiration
• Change in breathing sound and rate
How can you help with

Noisy breathing/chest secretions
Raise head of the bed
Remove secretions from mouth
Reassure family
Touch to ease fear
Inform Staff Nurse or Doctor
How can you help with

**Visions/hallucinations/restlessness**

Always identify yourself, use gentle voice

Reassure their family

Do not discount the experience unless it is distressing

If patient is distressed inform the nurse/doctor

Consider use of light massage, soothing music
Mouthcare

The main aims of oral care are:-

• Keep the lips and oral mucosa clean, soft, moist and intact
• Prevents infection, decay and halitosis
• Remove food debris as well as dental plaque
• Alleviate pain and discomfort and enhance oral intake
• Minimise distress, embarrassment and social isolation
• Maintains dignity even as death approaches
Principles of Care in the Last 48hrs

- Recognising dying phase
- Symptom control
  - Review medication and symptoms
  - Maintain effective communication
- Avoid unnecessary interventions
- Support family and carers
Unnecessary Interventions?

- Blood pressure monitoring
- Excessive turning
- Blood sugar monitoring
- Intravenous hydration
- Enteral Feeds – PEG feeds
Some Issues/Concerns
Expressed by Relatives

- Does morphine hasten death?
- How will they die?
- Distressing symptoms
- Starving to death
- Dying of thirst
- Something must be done
- Feeling helpless
- How long have they got?
- How will I know they are dying?
- Does morphine hasten death?
- Feeling helpless

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Carer/ Family Issues

- Needing advice
- Financial concerns
- Uncertainty
- Fear
- Unpredictable situation
- Lacking help
- Exhaustion
- Emotional distress
- Grief (loss)
Spiritual support

• Make time to identify any spiritual needs
• Recognise any spiritual distress
• Know where to get support
• Importance of religious sacraments for the dying patient
Communication Issues

• Appropriate support for relatives can impact positively for the bereaved.
• The quiet time before death when the patient is no longer communicating can be physically and emotionally draining for families/carers.
• Take time with the family to listen, acknowledge their loss and give space for them to reflect.
Support Care & Information for Relatives after Death

- Explaining process of care (last offices)
- Verification
- Certification
- Funeral preparation
- Bereavement support
Information Site

• [www.bereavementadvice.org](http://www.bereavementadvice.org) with telephone helpline 0800 6349494

• This offers information on just about everything you need to know about arranging a funeral and much more.