

# Palliative Care on 7 South

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This is a difficult time for you and your family. It may be very hard to think about what would happen if you do not get better. However, it is important to decide what type of care you would like to receive if your condition worsens or if there is an emergency (such as your heartbeat slows or breathing stops). By making your wishes known, the health care team can do everything possible to provide the type of care you have chosen.

This booklet gives you information about palliative care that you may need to consider now or sometime in the future.

## What is palliative care?

Palliative care is care provided for people who have a life-limiting illness for which there is no cure. The focus of palliative care is providing good quality of life – in other words, keeping the patient as comfortable and free from pain as possible.

Palliative care may involve medicine, treatments and physical care. Psychological, social services and spiritual support are also available to patients and those helping to care for them.

## What will palliative care mean for me and my loved ones?

In some cases, palliative care can help you plan for a natural and peaceful death.

Palliative care:

- provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms
  - affirms life and regards dying as a normal process
  - intends neither to hasten or postpone death
  - integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care
  - uses a team approach to address the needs of patients and their families
  - offers a support system to help the family cope during the patient's illness including bereavement counselling if needed
  - enhances quality of life, and may also positively influence the course of illness
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The focus of your care may change with the addition or continuation of some treatments and may mean stopping other types of treatment.

The health care team may suggest that you be transferred to a location where your palliative care needs will continue to be met. This may be your home or a facility that specializes in providing care that focuses on comfort and quality of life such as a hospice.

## **Consider what is important to you at this time in your life...**

Decisions about your care should reflect your personal values and respect your beliefs about what is important. You may want to consider:

- What represents a good quality of life for me?
- Will I still be able to experience the things that make my life meaningful?
- Do I want everything done to prolong my life even if I do not have a good quality of life? Or, would I prefer to allow a natural death?
- Do I have cultural or religious values that influence the decisions made about my care?
- Do I have questions about the dying process?
- Who should make decisions for me if I cannot speak for myself?

## **Family meeting**

The health care team feels it is important for you to know how things are going. They will give you information about the choices you have and will support you and your loved ones to help you make decisions about your care. It is also important that you ask us any questions you may have. We will schedule a meeting with you soon to talk about next steps.

## **Swallowing assessment**

Your health care team may have suggestions on what kinds of food and drink you can have safely and comfortably. Your family can offer you easy-to-take foods, such as ice cream, apple sauce and pudding if you are still able to eat and swallow. Staff will show your family how to give you small amounts of these types of foods for comfort.

## **Food and fluids when nearing the end of life**

When people are near the end of life, it is natural that they may slow down or stop their intake of food and fluids by mouth.

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## **Do people who are dying experience hunger and thirst?**

If their mouths and lips are kept moist, people who are dying do not feel hunger and thirst in the way we do. This is because their bodies are slowing down and do not need food and fluid to function. It is as though nature provides for comfort, knowing that a person is not able to eat or drink. People can sometimes live days to weeks, even without any food or fluids.

## **Mouth care**

Mouth care is a part of each patient's care plan. Keeping the mouth clean and moist is important in palliative care as it promotes a feeling of comfort for your loved one. The health care team will help you with mouth care throughout the day.

Family members can learn how to provide your mouth care. Care includes moistening the lips and mouth with water. The mouth can be cleansed inside with mouth washes and a moisturizer applied to the lips regularly. Moisture mouth sprays are also available for you to use. Ask your health care team for advice about these sprays. A humidifier in the room can help by keeping the air moist.

## **What about giving fluids through a needle?**

Fluids containing sugar and salt can be given by an intravenous or butterfly needle. While this is not needed at the end of life, there may be certain reasons for doing so. Your health care team may discuss this option with you.

If the key goal of care is for you to maintain comfort, fluids by needle are not needed.

## **What about feeding tubes?**

Feeding tubes give liquid food through a fine tube in the nose or a tube through the abdomen into the stomach. They can be helpful for people who cannot swallow well enough to eat, and where the goals of care are to prolong life and gain strength. Feeding tubes have some complications and may be somewhat uncomfortable for the patient.

## **Bowel routine**

When someone becomes less mobile and starts eating less, their bowel movements become less regular. This is also caused by changes in diet. The team may recommend a laxative to help your love one feel more comfortable.

## Mobility

The health care team will reposition you as needed in order to keep you as comfortable as possible. We will make sure that you have the equipment needed to keep you comfortable and pain free.

## A note to families and visitors

Being in the hospital can be frustrating and stressful. We will do our best to help you through this difficult time.

Respect is important when challenges are experienced. The Mutual Respect campaign at Hamilton Health Sciences is about working together and supporting each other. A Mutual Respect booklet is available for patients and families for more information. If you would like a copy of this booklet, please ask a staff member.



## How else can I comfort my loved one?

You may wish to consider trying the following:

- massaging his/her hands and feet with lotion
- talking with your loved one and sharing memories, thoughts and feelings  
Even people who cannot answer you may be able to hear and know you are there with them
- placing a favourite quilt and pillow on the bed
- placing flowers and favourite photos near the bedside
- playing favourite music softly in the background
- taking your loved one outdoors if the weather is good
- arranging visits from family pets
- any other ideas you may have that would be comforting for you

The 7 South Manager or Clinical Leader is available Monday to Friday, during working hours, at 905-521-2100, ext. 46858.