



END OF LIFE CARE FOR SOMEONE YOU LOVE

~Brought to you by:

Blue Water Rest Home Palliative Care Committee



**THIS BOOKLET
IS DEDICATED
TO THE
RESIDENTS AND FAMILIES
FROM WHOM
WE HAVE LEARNED
SO MUCH,
AND TO ALL THOSE
WHO CARE FOR THEM**

Although it is impossible to totally prepare for a death, a death may be made easier if you know what to expect. This pamphlet may be helpful in preparing you as family and/or caregiver to understand the final stage of life. It is important to discuss your concerns and fears with those around you, both your family and health care providers. These people can help you make choices with or for your loved one and can inform you about other services that are available to support you.

Death is a natural process as the body begins shutting down. The following physical and emotional signs of approaching death are described on the following pages to help you understand what can happen. Not all these signs and symptoms will occur with every person nor will they occur in any particular sequence.

This brochure is intended only as a guide. It is not intended to replace advice given by a health care professional.

HELPFUL HINTS

- A calming effect may be achieved by sitting quietly at the bedside, playing soothing music or reading something comforting.
- Sit with your resident. Hold their hand and reassure them that you are there.
- Continue to speak with them, as their hearing ability remains until the moment of death.
- Identify yourself by name, and speak softly, clearly, and truthfully when communicating.
- Talk to them during care and explain what you are doing.

WHAT CAN I EXPECT?

- You may have feelings such as guilt, anger, frustration, sadness, uncertainty, and helplessness; these are common and normal responses.
- You may experience emotional and physical exhaustion.
- Tears are a natural expression of one's feelings. Some may internalize their feelings and may not be able to cry. Both reactions are normal.
- You may encounter disruption of family and work routines; at times you may lose the ability to concentrate on anything.
- Goodbyes are appropriate. Both family/loved one and the resident may find comfort in 'letting go'.

SPIRITUAL CARE

During this time, a member of the clergy or our Social Worker can provide support and comfort to both family/loved ones and the resident. People may vary greatly in their religious beliefs and needs. If there are any rites or sacraments that are desired by your loved one, please speak a member of the Activation Team or the Social Worker.



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL SIGNS OF APPROACHING DEATH

As death approaches, your resident may become quieter and less interested in physical surroundings. They may become withdrawn, less sociable and have confusion about time and place.

Vision like experiences may occur. Your resident may see or speak to people and places not visible to you. Try not to explain away/minimize what they are saying. Be supportive and listen.

Your resident may experience different emotional states such as guilt, anger, frustration, fear, helplessness, or sadness. Tears are a natural expression of one's feelings and may occur in both the resident and/or their family.

PHYSICAL SIGNS OF APPROACHING DEATH

REDUCED FOOD & FLUID INTAKE:

Loss of appetite and decrease in thirst are common. The body is beginning to shut down and does not need nourishment. People commonly feel it is necessary to encourage eating and/or drinking in the hope of sustaining life; however, food and fluid may cause discomfort. The person may ask for ice chips, popsicles, ice cream or some other food choice. It is very common that a resident may only take a mouthful or two. When swallowing is no longer possible, mouth care provides moisture and comfort. At this stage, please do not offer fluids if swallowing is not possible.

SLEEPING

Sleeping an increased amount of time is common. It may become more difficult to waken your resident. As death nears, your resident may slip into a coma and become unresponsive.

ELIMINATION

Output of urine and stool will decrease as their food and fluid intake decreases. Urine and stool may also change colour, be passed less frequently and in smaller amounts. Other factors such as immobility and medication may also contribute



to this.

Your loved one may lose control of their bladder and bowel function as the muscles begin to relax. In this instance, it may be necessary to use an incontinence brief.

If you have questions or would like to further discuss the management of these symptoms, please speak with a member of the Nursing and/or PSW team. To help keep your resident comfortable, skin care and cleansing on a routine basis is important.

RESTLESSNESS AND DISORIENTATION

Confusion as to time, place, and recognition of people, even family members and close friends is common. At times your loved one may become restless. For example, they may reach out to unseen objects, pull at bed clothes, or try to get out of bed. This can occur for many reasons such as lack of oxygen circulation to the brain or changes in conditions and/or medications. Please speak with the Nursing team to further discuss these changes.

CHANGES IN BREATHING

Regular breathing patterns may change. Breathing may stop for 10 to 30 second periods or there may be periods of rapid, shallow panting. These breathing patterns are normal and indicate the natural progression towards death. A moaning sound occurs as the breath passes over the relaxed vocal cords.

CONGESTION

Gurgling sounds, often loud, occur when a person is unable to cough up normal secretions. This does not normally cause pain or discomfort. Turning the resident to one side and gently wiping away secretions with a moist cloth can be helpful. As secretions build up, keeping the head of the bed elevated (by using pillows), will make breathing easier. Sometimes medications can be ordered to help dry up secretions. Oral suctioning may be done; however, this usually causes an increase in secretion production.

SKIN

You may notice your loved one's skin begin to change colour and become cooler to touch. Their face may be pale and their feet and legs a purple-blue mottling colour. This is a sign that the circulation of their blood is slowing down.

Although your loved one is cool to touch, they are usually comfortable. Warm blankets may be offered.

HOW WILL I KNOW DEATH HAS OCCURRED?

Even though death is expected, you may not be prepared for the moment it occurs. At the time of death:

- There will be no response
- There will be no breathing
- There will be no pulse
- Eyes will be fixed in one direction
- Eyelids may be opened or closed
- There may be loss of control of the bladder or bowel

Please remember that this is an expected death and no further medical intervention, or emergency services are required.

AFTER DEATH HAS OCCURED

- The nurse will call the physician so that the death can be certified.
- We support you spending time with your deceased loved one, if you wish.
- The nurse will call the funeral home you have chosen.
- As the funeral home takes your loved one into their care and they depart from Blue Water Rest Home, staff will announce and participate in an Honour Guard procession. Family/loved ones are welcome to participate in this ceremony.
- The funeral home will contact the family directly to further discuss funeral and/or memorial service arrangements.
- Blue Water Rest Home will notify the Ministry of Long-Term Care of the



death of your loved one.

You may have dealt with many intense emotions and challenges in your journey through the loss of your loved one. It is important to realize that grief is a highly personal response to life losses. Grief may last longer than society recognizes, so be patient with yourself and allow for the expression of feelings that you are experiencing.

ADMINISTRATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

We ask that you make arrangements to pick up the loved one’s belongings within 24 hours. This timely request is due to Blue Water Rest Home’s requirement to meet vacancy guidelines established by the Ministry of and Long-Term Care.

We appreciate the gesture; however, personal item donations cannot be accepted.

We encourage you to contact Blessings Community Store at 519-236-4376 if you are looking to donate your wheelchairs, walkers, clothing, furniture, etc.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks to our Palliative Care colleagues for their review of this booklet and/or their contributions and reflections:

Fairfield Park Nursing Home, Wallaceburg.

The information in this booklet may be copied and shared.

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