

## Caring for the Hospice Patient

### A Guide to Coping with Anxiety and Sadness

Anxiety is a common symptom in patients nearing death. Regardless of the cause, anxiety should be identified and managed promptly.

#### Recognizing Anxiety

Anxiety has cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physical manifestations ranging from mild to severe. Reactions to anxiety can vary. Some may be able to verbalize what they are feeling and other may not. Many of the physical manifestations of anxiety are similar to those caused by the underlying illnesses and treatments. It's important to know what anxiety looks like so you can easily recognize it when it happens.

- Mild anxiety: The patient may be irritable or mildly upset. They might be short-tempered or easily annoyed. They may experience insomnia or difficulty resting.
- Moderate anxiety: The patient may be restless, visibly upset, and have increasing irritability. They may be tearful and express feelings of worry or uneasiness. They may have an increased heart rate, fast breathing, or complain of nausea.
- Severe anxiety/panic: The patient may not be able to focus, even when clear directions are given. The patient may be crying uncontrollably, appear greatly agitated, and even yell and scream. The patient may even have vomiting, chest pain, sweating, dry mouth, or trembling.

#### Treatment

If your loved one is beginning to show signs of anxiety, the first thing you should do is try to calm him down. Sometimes simple distraction could be enough to reduce anxiety level and keep them calm. Breathing techniques, a warm compress, or allowing the patient to discuss their feelings of anxiety or sadness may also help.

If the patient's anxiety or sadness persists, **call the hospice team at 9815-732-2499 and report to the nurse** that they are showing signs of anxiety. The hospice nurse will give you specific instructions and may send a nurse out to evaluate the situation. There are medications to treat anxiety. The hospice nurse may give you instructions to start one of the medications.

Our hospice team of volunteers, chaplains, bereavement coordinator, social workers, comfort aide, nurses, and physicians can help your loved one if they experience these symptoms.

## **Caring for the Hospice Patient**

### **Anxiety and Sadness cont...**

Sadness is the normal, emotional response to a loss. Each person grieves in his or her own way. There is no right way to express sadness. While grief is often associated with the death of a loved one, it may also be experienced at the time of other losses such as the loss of function due to illness, loss of a pet, loss through divorce, loss of future dreams or role changes, and many other changes in life or health.

### **Tips for Helping Your Loved One with Sadness and Grief:**

- Help your loved one maintain a realistic sense of hope, even in the midst of dying. Reframe hope by helping the patient hope for a good night's rest, for better pain control today, or for the chance to see grandchildren one more time.
- Remember that your caring presence is more important than "saying the right thing" and listening may be more comforting to a patient than trying to make conversation.
- As death approaches, a patient may withdraw from everything outside of him/herself in an attempt to cope with the many changes that are occurring. Withdrawal can be part of the natural dying process. Help family and friends understand that process is expected and normal.

### **Tips for Helping You Through the Healing Process**

- Give yourself permission to grieve loss and change
- Get plenty of rest, exercise and eat a healthy diet
- Try to have at least one close person with whom you share your feelings and receive support
- Consider keeping a journal to write down your feelings
- Don't push yourself to make changes in your life too quickly
- Reminiscing and putting together a memory book provide an active way to heal
- Get information about the normal grief process
- Attend a community grief support group by contacting our bereavement team

If you or your loved one are struggling with sadness and grief, call the hospice team at 815-732-2499 to discuss your concerns so we can help you during this process.