

Hospice of the Upstate Volunteer Newsletter

March 2016



5 Signs and Symptoms at End of Life and How to Respond to Them

Symptom

How to Respond

Loss of appetite



Don't force-feed; follow the person's cues even though you may be distressed by a loss of interest in eating.

Periodically offer ice chips, a popsicle, or sips of water. Use a moistened warm cloth around the mouth and apply balm to the lips to keep them moist and comfortable.

Sleeping



Sit with your loved one, hold his or her hand, but do not shake it or speak loudly. Speak softly and naturally. Do not talk about the person in the person's presence. Speak to him or her directly as you normally would, even though there may be no response. Never assume the person cannot hear, hearing is the last of the senses to be lost.

Secretions



The person may have gurgling sounds coming from his or her chest. This normal change is due to the decrease of fluid intake and an inability to cough up normal secretions. Suctioning usually only increases the secretions and causes sharp discomfort. Gently turn the person's head to the side and allow gravity to drain the secretions. The sound does not indicate the onset of severe or new pain.

Restlessness



The person may make restless and repetitive motions such as pulling at bed linen or clothing. This often happens and is due in part to the decrease in oxygen circulation to the brain and to metabolism changes. Do not interfere with or try to restrain such motions. To have a calming effect, speak in a quiet natural way. Other things which may be helpful in calming the person are to recall a favorite place the person enjoyed, a favorite experience, read something comforting, play music and give assurance that it is okay to let go.

Breathing Pattern
Change



The person's regular breathing pattern may change with the onset of a different breathing pace. A particular pattern consists of breathing irregularly, ie shallow breaths with periods of no breathing of 5 to 30 seconds and up to a full minute. This is called Cheyne-Stokes breathing. The person may also experience periods of rapid shallow pant-like breathing. These patterns are very common and indicate decrease in circulation in the internal organs. Elevating the head, and/or turning the person onto his or her side may bring comfort. Hold your loved one's hand. Speak gently.

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On February 18, the Bleckley Inn was filled with candy themed decorations, great food and wonderful volunteers. Our Annual Volunteer Luncheon was a huge success. Around 100 volunteers and staff enjoyed a delicious meal while laughing at Greenville comedian, Jason Farr. A huge thank you to our "sweet" volunteers and all the time, energy and love they give to our patients & organization.

