

TITLE: Preparing for the Last Days

Topic: 8

Preparing for predictable end of life care can help to alleviate some of the burden on family caregivers in the last days.

There are many predictable changes that occur as a person approaches death. These changes are often obvious to professional caregivers but require open conversation and planning to assist families and the patient to understand the meaning of the changes. Clear goal setting and dialogue are essential to anticipate and plan for the changes before they occur. This preparation will increase the likelihood of optimal symptom management and a sense of control during a difficult time.

Mobility/Activity changes

- Tired with increased fall risk
- Bedbound
- Inability to ambulate for toileting, may need a commode, urinary catheter

Changes in oral intake

- Decreased intake of food and fluids
- Inability to swallow oral medications

Cognitive changes

- Somnolence can be related to; medications, disease progression
- Confusion
- Unconsciousness

Common symptoms and physical changes

- Disease related progression of existing symptoms (example; lung cancer increased dyspnea)
- Dyspnea, other breathing changes, Cheyne stokes
- Delirium, agitation, hallucinations
- Terminal secretions
- Pain does not often develop at end of life if not present already
- Changes in skin colour and mottling

Planning

- Communicate openly and clearly at all times
- Prepare for alternate medication route(s)
- Logistical implications, bed, other equipment, Letter of Anticipated Death
- Team cohesion and consistent approach to achieve goals