

Meeting the Needs of the Dying and Their Loved Ones

Death is an inevitable part of life. This fact is one of the lessons we all learn—often in childhood with the passing of a close relative, neighbor, friend, or even a pet.

Yet these deaths may not prepare us for the emotional, psychological or physical strain of being present while a loved one dies of a long-standing illness.

An impending death will cause the person to reflect on his or her life—assessing their self-worth, their interpersonal relationships with friends and family, whether they lived life as fully as they could have, or if their religious beliefs are substantive.

Spiritual advisors from all areas of the community can be the compassionate voice that guides these individuals and their families through these struggles.

The importance of presence

In today's busy world, many people feel the “pull” to be in multiple places at the same time. This is no less true for those who feel a calling to minister to individuals who are suffering or otherwise in need.

There never seems to be a shortage of patients in need of spiritual care and support. However, the needs of family members or friends who care for them are sometimes overlooked, as they may appear to be coping with their situation. But they may not be OK. Families may feel isolated and forgotten by friends who do not wish to intrude or may not know what to say.

It is important that caregivers stay connected with their communities. The presence of a spiritual leader—whether a member of the clergy or church, or simply a close acquaintance who takes the time to minister to the spirit—will remind caregivers that their needs are also important and they are not forgotten or overlooked.

Keys to Being a Good Listener

Part of being “present” is being a good listener.

- Create a comfortable environment
- Be willing to listen even if your desire is to speak

- Allow the patient to struggle with the issues he or she faces
- Allow there to be times of silence
- Be willing to touch and hold when needed
- Understand that grief is a journey
- Be present emotionally and intellectually as well as physically
- Remember that no two people face death or deal with it in the same way
- Know when to refer the patient to another professional for care

The importance of voice

Death is the inevitable result faced by a person with a terminal illness. But impending death also brings on responsibilities for friends, family members and others who have agreed to speak or act on behalf of the patient.

Knowing they may lose some ability to make health decisions, some patients will sign a living will that designates a trusted individual to act for them when the need arises. This person decides whether to allow treatments such as feeding tubes, dialysis and cardiac resuscitation. As death nears, the caregivers are faced with making ethical decisions for the patient. These decisions cause dilemmas as to what the patient really wants.

Spiritual advisors play an important role in this process. They can offer guidance in the decision-making process, and help the patient accept the decisions that are made on their behalf.

For more information, please visit
www.aseracare.com

AseraCare offers services and programs to patients without discrimination on the basis of race, color, creed, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, status as a Vietnam era veteran, qualified special disabled veteran, recently separated veteran, or other protected veteran, or source of payment.