

Module 9

DEATH & DYING

- What is Palliative Care?
- Physical, Psychological, Social and Spiritual Concerns
- Care Responsibilities for the Home Support Worker
- Duties Following Death

DEATH & DYING

Please note: At all times follow the principles of **Back Injury Prevention** as set out in Module 2. If you have any questions, of a specific nature, contact Compassion HomeCare immediately to discuss it with the Registered Nurse.

What is Palliative Care?

Palliative Care ...

- ✎ is caring for the Physical, Emotional and Spiritual needs of terminally ill clients*
- ✎ is aimed at improving the quality of the client's remaining life*

Most people in our society feel uncomfortable talking or thinking about death. Sometimes, to deal with our feelings we try to avoid working with the person who is dying, or we rush through our tasks as quickly as possible so that we can leave the room. This can leave the dying person feeling isolated, lonely or deserted.

By using the same caring, consideration and understanding you use with clients who will recover, you will be able to work with clients who are dying.

“We need to take direction from the client who is dying”

Palliative Care should be planned to reflect the values of the person who is dying; that is, what matters to him and what he cares about. Respecting the dying person's preferences is crucial to promoting dignity and self-worth.

We, the caregivers, need to take direction from the dying person when we consider issues related to quality of life.

Bereavement

Palliative Care does not end at the moment of death, but continues with support and care for those who are left behind, the bereaved.

It is important to consider this when planning your care, to ensure that those who are bereaved have the support they need through the period of transition that follows the loss of someone they love.

Physical, Psychological, Social and Spiritual Concerns

- **Physical Concerns:**

Pain management and the control of other physical symptoms are crucial to the principles of palliative care. If someone's physical suffering is not dealt with first, then there is little chance we can do much to alleviate non-physical symptoms.

- **Medications:**

Medications will be determined by a physician and supplied according to your client's condition and monitored by the agency supervisor. Other, non-medicinal care-giving techniques, such as back-rubs, can also be very effective in promoting and maintaining a person's level of comfort.

- **Psychological Concerns:**

It is important to accept that Palliative Care is intimately connected with loss, dying and death. With death comes a wide variety of emotional and psychological responses. Grief and other feelings related to loss are natural. Death can be peaceful, yet it can also be a struggle. To care for someone who is dying, you must acknowledge that Palliative Care is for the living as well as the dying.

- **Social Concerns:**

Although Palliative Care should always be centered on the person who is dying, it is also important to consider the needs of those who are close to the dying person. A part of them is dying as well. We are not only losing a person, we are losing that person's connection to the rest of the world: family, friends, work, and community.

Palliative Care is not confined to the bedside or the home. It is connected to the larger social and cultural network the dying person is a part of. Omitting the social aspects of Palliative Care would mean forgetting to care for the person as a whole. Also, there may be legal and financial matters that need to be addressed, and these are sometimes part of Palliative Care.

- **Spiritual Concerns:**

Death often brings spiritual exploration and affirmation. Many people who are dying will come to a deeper religious faith, while others will come to see life in a new way. The reconciliation of relationships, new insights and appreciations; all are part of cherishing life. Spiritual care involves

supporting and being a companion to the dying person through his or her personal moments.

Care Responsibilities for the Home Support Worker

- **Provide a Suitable Environment**
 - The room should be quiet, well ventilated, cheerful and pleasing. Do not exclude sunlight – some clients may want blinds closed at various times of the day. Air should be kept fresh and a regular temperature maintained.
 - Keep equipment or necessary devices out of sight.
 - Drugs or solutions with an unpleasant odour should not be left in the room.

- **Be Attentive**
 - Some clients do not wish to be left alone, others may need some time and space. Be attentive to the client's preferences.
 - Do not whisper in the presence of the dying person. It can be very disturbing. Hearing is the last sense to go.

- **Attitude toward Relatives and Friends**
 - Be kind and considerate to close relatives and people who mean a great deal to the client.
 - Try to provide privacy for the family.
 - Relatives should eat regularly and get the required amount of sleep and rest.

Duties following Death

In addition to the list below, it will be important for you to have a clear sense as to the wishes of your client and their family as to their wishes or specific plans for after the client passes away. This can include who is to be called, any special tribute to be completed (prayer, playing of music, etc.). It will also be important for you to contact your supervisor at the first available appropriate time.

If you are with a client that passes away, these are the steps you should follow:

- Call the Home Care Agency.
- Write down the time of death.
- Do not move the client.
- Sometimes the family members will have specific requests regarding what to do when the client dies.
- The doctor may ask you to clean the client's body. (At death, all body functions stop and relaxed muscles cause the bowel and bladder to empty.)
- Call the agency if you have any questions or concerns.

You may be asked to stay and help the family following death. Ask the family how you can help and try to do whatever is necessary to help them through this difficult time:

- Answer phones, call friends or family.
- Make coffee, snacks.
- Sit with grieving family members and listen.
- Strip the bed and air the room if necessary.
- Clean and remove any equipment from the room if needed.
- Place personal items carefully at the bedside so family members can remove them at the appropriate time.

Some Home Support Workers wish to attend the funeral of the deceased client. It gives them a formal chance to say goodbye and shows the family how much they cared for the client.

You must examine your own feelings on the subject, as well as respect family wishes and do as you feel best. If you have any questions or concerns contact your local office to discuss this with your Supervisor.