Final Hours in End of Life

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The Final Hours, as we approach the end of life, can be physically and emotionally exhausting for the family and staff.

- Objectives of this module include:
  - Sign and symptoms of imminent death
  - Assessment of needs and interventions for the dying patient and family
  - Care following death
Role of the EOL Team

- As death appears imminent, it is vital that the EOL Care Team provides increased support to include:
  - Daily visit/presence in the home to provide emotional support and symptom management
  - Availability after hours for telephone calls and home visits as needed
Assessment of needs and interventions

• The dying process is an individualized process and can differ from person to person

• Because of this, needs and preferences differ from family to family

• Education, support and trusting communication between the EOL Team and family is critical during this phase
Common Signs and Symptoms of Imminent Death

- Pain
- Digestive symptoms
- Dyspnea
Not everyone who is dying experiences pain

Pain is easier to prevent; severe pain is harder to manage

Education and availability of pain medication in the home should be considered by the EOL team as early as possible
Pain

• Nonpharmacological measures: repositioning, heat/cold packs, quiet, nonstimulating environment

• Pharmacological measures: consider OTC pain medications, low dose opioids, titrating as needed
Digestive symptoms

• Includes nausea, vomiting, constipation, loss of appetite
• Educate family with food and liquid options as tolerated
• Educate/reassure family that loss of appetite and decreased intake is a normal process of dying
• Utilize pharmacological measures to avoid constipation and manage symptoms
Dyspnea

• Common experience at the end of life
• “Death Rattle” is more upsetting to the family than for the dying loved one
• Nonpharmacological measures include repositioning to side lying, elevating the head of bed, use of a fan/humidifier
• Consider pharmacological measures, including use of opioids, benzodiazepines, anticholinergics
Other symptoms to consider

- Increased confusion/delirium
- Weakness and fatigue
- Increased drowsiness
- Restlessness/agitation
Common fears experienced by family

- Their loved one will experience pain
- Use of opioids, fearing they will “give the last dose”
- Being alone when the loved one expires
- What happens when the loved one dies
Signs of Death

- Absence of heartbeat and respirations
- Pupils are fixed
- Body temperature drops
- Skin color changes
- Relaxation of muscles and sphincters
EOL Team Support

- Immediate presence during death or following notification by family
- Death pronouncement
- Preparing the body for transfer to funeral home
- Removal of medications and equipment in the home
Final Hours Conclusion

- Sign and symptoms of imminent death
- Assessment of needs and interventions for the dying patient and family
- Care following death

- The EOL Team has the responsibility to educate and support families through the final stages of their loved one’s life.
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