

Withdrawing from the world

Your relative/friend may become progressively drowsy, become more difficult to rouse and generally spend more time sleeping.

At times your relative/friend may appear disorientated and not recognise familiar faces. Whilst this may be difficult for you, it does not generally cause distress for the person as they naturally withdraw from the world.

Caring for your relative/friend and supporting you during this difficult time is very important to us. The nurses, and doctors and other staff are here to help you with your worries and concerns and to offer care and support at this sad time.

This leaflet is available in audio, Braille, large print and other languages. To request a copy, please ask a member of staff.

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Victoria Infirmary
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Elmhurst Intermediate Care Centre
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What to expect in the last days of life

Important information for patients



Introduction

The doctors and nurses looking after your relative/friend, believe that the changes in their condition indicate that they are now dying and in the last days or hours of life.

The staff want to ensure that your relative/friend has the best quality of care at the end of their life.

This includes treating your relative/friend with dignity and respect and ensuring that you feel supported.

Communication

The staff will want to involve you in discussions regarding the plan of care and you will be able to ask questions to help you understand the reasons behind any decisions taken.

The team looking after your relative/friend will make regular assessments of their condition.

Please do not hesitate to speak to the staff regarding any worries or concerns you may have.

The doctors and nurses will need to ask you for your contact details to ensure you are kept informed of any changes.

Medication

Medication will be reviewed and any medication that is not helpful at this time may be stopped. New medications may be prescribed that will help your relative/friend to remain comfortable and will be given if required.

It may not be possible to give medication by mouth at this time so medication may be given by an injection or sometimes, if needed, by a 'syringe pump' which gives medications continuously over 24 hours.

Spiritual Needs

As your relative/friend becomes increasingly sleepy you may find that they are not as responsive as they were. Try not to feel discouraged as simply being together can be a great comfort to both of you. Being with someone who cares for them helps people feel that their lives have been worthwhile and that they will be remembered.

The hospital Chaplaincy Team are available to discuss any spiritual needs or requirements should you feel this appropriate. If you would like to speak to a hospital chaplain, please let the nursing staff know.

Knowing what to expect

The dying process is unique to each person and not knowing what to expect may add to your anxiety. Some of the most common changes which may occur are as follows:

Reduced need for food and drink

Loss of interest and a reduced need for food and drink is part of the normal dying process. This is often difficult to accept even when we know a relative/friend is dying. They will be supported to take food and drink by mouth for as long as possible.

Decisions about the use of a drip will be made in the best interest of your relative/friend at this time. This decision will be explained to you and reviewed regularly.

Changes in breathing

There may be changes in the breathing pattern, with breaths becoming shallow, deep, fast or slow and there can often be long gaps between breaths. Sometimes the breathing can be noisy, which is often due to mucous on the chest. Whilst this can sound noisy and can be upsetting for you, it does not generally cause distress to the dying patient. The doctor or nurse can discuss this further with you.