

What to expect in the last days of life

Palliative Care Department



Supportive & Palliative Care Team

Carer information leaflet

This leaflet aims to answer some of the questions you may have about dying. It explains some of the physical changes that can happen at the end of life and what to expect after a death.

There has been a change in the condition of your relative/friend. The doctors looking after your relative/friend think that they may be dying or in the last hours or days of life.

How do you know when someone is dying?

It is very difficult to know exactly how long someone has left to live but there are some common changes that help us to know when someone is dying.

What are those changes?

- People eat and drink less
- People become more sleepy
- There may be changes in breathing

Why do people eat and drink less?

When someone is dying eating and drinking becomes more of an effort and they may lose interest in eating and drinking.

What happens when they are no longer able to eat and drink?

Everyone is helped to eat and drink for as long as they wish and as long as they are able. When they are no longer able to eat and drink the use of a "drip" will be discussed with the patient (where able) and their family.

Why do people become more sleepy?

When someone is dying they become weaker so spend more and more time asleep. When they are awake they may be drowsy and show less interest in what is going on around them.

What happens about taking medicines?

Medicines that are not helpful at this time may be stopped. New medicines that may be needed will be prescribed. These will include medicines for pain, shortness of breath, nausea and vomiting, restlessness and agitation.

What are the changes in breathing?

There may be long pauses between breaths or the breaths may be fast and shallow. Occasionally in the last hours of life there can be a noisy rattle to the breathing. Moving position and medication may help.

Are there any other changes?

The skin may become pale, moist or mottled. The temperature may go up or down. Adjusting the bed covers may help.

What happens now?

To make sure that the care we give your relative/friend meets their needs and wishes we will be using a Personalised End of Life Care Plan (PELiCan). We will talk to your relative/friend (where possible) and to you to find out what is important at this time. The care given will include their/your needs and wishes. The care will be looked at daily and we will talk to you every day.

What about car parking?

Visitors of dying patients are not expected to pay car parking charges. Please speak to the nurse in charge if you have parked your car in one of the hospital car parks.

What about visiting?

Families of dying patients may visit at any time and will be given a Carers' Passport. Any visitor wishing to stay overnight will be made as comfortable as possible.

What about support?

The doctors and nurses on the ward will support you. The Supportive & Palliative Care Team and the Chaplaincy Team are also available. If you don't belong to a particular faith The Chaplaincy Team can still spend time with you. If you are a member of a faith community and you would like someone who represents your particular tradition to be contacted please speak to someone on the ward. If you need other support services we will fill out a Carers' Prescription.

What about refreshments?

Caring for someone can be difficult. Looking after yourself is very important. The ward can provide you with basic refreshments. However the following food and drink options are also available:

The Lifestyle Restaurant on level A is open 7am to 5pm and serves a variety of hot and cold meals.

Costa Coffee in the main entrance is open Monday to Friday 7am to 9pm, Saturday 7.30am to 9pm and Sunday 7.30am to 8.30pm and offers a selection of hot and cold drinks as well as sandwiches, pastries, cakes and snacks.

Marks and Spencer Simply Food in the main entrance is open Monday to Friday 7am to 8.30pm, Saturday 7.30am to 8.30pm and Sunday 8.00am to 8.30pm and stocks over 1000 different food and drinks as well as having an instore bakery.

Deli Marche Café in St Lukes is open Monday to Friday 7am to 4pm and offers a selection of fresh bean coffee, cold drinks and snacks.

Costa Express Coffee Bar in the Accident & Emergency Department offers drinks.

In addition there are a number of vending machines situated around the outpatient departments.

Tesco Superstore on Ashenden Road is open 24 hours.

How will I know when someone has died?

The signs of death are usually recognisable. Breathing has stopped and there is no pulse. The skin will be cool, the eyes may be open and the jaw relaxed.

What happens after someone has died?

If you are on your own at the time of death please call a member of staff who will be able to support you. You will be given time to stay and to call any other family members.

Before you leave the ward you will be given a bereavement booklet. The booklet provides information and guidance following bereavement. You will have to return to the hospital when the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death has been completed. A Relatives Officer will contact you with an appointment. When you return to collect the certificate any personal belongings will be returned to you and you will be told how to register the death. You will be given information offering you further support.

Who should I contact if I have any other questions?

The doctors and nurses on the ward can answer any questions. A member of the Supportive & Palliative Care Team will visit at least once a day. You can also contact the Supportive & Palliative Care Team on **01483 571122** ext **4188** (messages can be left on the answer phone). They are available 9am to 5pm, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. You may wish to write any questions you have in the back of this booklet.

Further information

Cruse bereavement care

- Telephone: 0808 808 1677
- Website: www.cruse.org.uk

The Samaritans

- Telephone: 01483 505555
- Website: www.samaritans.org

Contact details

Supportive & Palliative Care Team

Telephone: 01483 571122 **ext** 4188

PALS and Advocacy contact details

Contact details of independent advocacy services can be provided by our Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) who are located on the right hand side as you enter the main reception area. PALS are also your first point of contact for health related issues, questions or concerns surrounding RSCH patient services.

Telephone: 01483 402757

Email: rsc-tr.pals@nhs.net

Opening hours: 9.00am–3.00pm, Monday to Friday

If you would like information documents in large print, on tape or in another language or form please contact PALS.

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