

Ministering to the Terminally Ill

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Outline of the Session presented by Trudy Harris

Hospice

- Hospice patients may live at home or in nursing homes, or may stay in the hospital.
- Working with Hospice is a very moving and touching experience.

Terminally Ill Patients Are All Ages and Die for Many Reasons.

God Tells His Children When They Are Dying.

- The Lord prepares a dying person to come home to Him.
- The Lord allows the dying person to experience the things to which He alone knows that person will respond.
- Each death experience is different and individual.

Attend to Physical Needs First, But Emphasize Spiritual Needs Most.

- Probably only about 25 to 30 percent of a dying person's fear is physical.
 - The problem of pain control must be addressed first.
 - Nutritional issues must be addressed.
 - The dying person needs to be given as great a physical comfort level as possible.
- The other 70 to 75 percent of a person's fear is emotional and spiritual.
 - As the body declines, the spiritual self begins to surface.
 - Each person's view of or connectedness with God may be very different.
 - A dying person will often ask, in search of his or her human significance: "Who am I?," "Why was I here?," "Did I really matter?"

Experiences of Death Vary

- Death may not come for a person when we think it will.
- There may be a coming and a going for a dying person that God lets only that person experience.
- God allows the dying person to experience Himself and others who have gone before him or her.
- Death is the most vulnerable time for a person who is dying – no masks, no "one-upmanship."
- Many dying people see angels.

People Often Need Permission From Loved Ones to Die.

Listen to the Dying Person's Needs

- A dying person may or may not wish to have loved ones present.
- Some patients may not be able to die until there has been reconciliation of troubled relationships.
- Resolved relationships can allow a more peaceful death.

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"Dying Well" – Who Dies With The Greatest Ease?

- Children pass through the death experience more easily because they don't have the fears, hangups, or built-in expectations about God, as do adults.
- Those who have had born-again experiences.
- Those who know Jesus as Friend, Brother, Savior, Messiah and Lover.

God Accepts Us As We Are – A dying person may experience the fullness of God’s love just prior to death.

Understanding God’s Mercy and Forgiveness and the Forgiveness of Other People.

- A person who understand and experiences God’s mercy and forgiveness dies well.
- If yours is the last face a dying person will see before he or she sees God, what will that person see in your face? Forgiveness? Love? Compassion?
- Broken relationships on earth make for difficulties in perceiving a loving, forgiving God.
- Some people really have a sense of forgiveness and can forgive more easily.

You Don’t Have to Have All the Answers, But God May Give You One Now and Then

- The Lord may reveal a truth to you which will be very helpful or confirming to the dying person.
- The Lord may allow a dying person to see the “tapestry” of his or her life in a non-condemning or non-judging way.

Not Afraid of Death, But Afraid of Dying.

Just Be There

- We tend to think when a loved one is dying that we have to do something.
- Do not try to minimize the person’s death experience or deny to the person that it is happening.
- Just listen to the dying person with a compassionate heart.

Dying is a Journey

- Dying is a journey one takes alone, but it doesn’t need to be a lonely experience.
- A dying person may want to express what is happening.
- Don’t deny the person by denying that death is taking place.

What about Nonbelievers Who Are Dying?

- Be a listener.
- Be open to their questions.
- Be an encourager.

God Can Reach Anyone, Believer or Not.

Miracles Do Happen

Ministering to the Terminally Ill Ministers to the Minister and Others

1. Ministering to a terminally-ill person is a very special spiritual growth opportunity.
2. A terminally-ill person may survive longer than expected because God is using the situation for spiritual growth for someone connected to that person in some way.
3. The experience and privilege of ministering to a terminally-ill person can really bring one closer to God.

When a person enters the final stage of the dying process, two different dynamics are at work which are closely interrelated and interdependent:

The Physical

On the physical plane, the body begins the final process of shutting down, which ends when all the physical systems cease to function. Usually this is an orderly and undramatic progressive series of physical changes which are not medical emergencies requiring invasive interventions. These physical changes are a normal, natural way in which the body prepares itself to stop, and the most appropriate kinds of responses are comfort-enhancing measures.

The Emotional/Spiritual

The other dynamic of the dying process is at work on the emotional, spiritual and mental planes and is a different kind of process. The "spirit" of the dying person begins the final process of release from the body, its immediate environment and all attachments. This release from the body has its own priorities, which include the resolution of whatever is unfinished of a practical nature, reconciliation of close relationships, and receiving permission to "let go" from family members. These "events" are the normal, natural way in which the spirit prepares to move from this materialistically-oriented realm of existence into the next dimension of life. The most appropriate kinds of responses to the emotions, spiritual and mental changes are those responses which support and encourage this release and transition.

When a person's body is ready and wanting to stop, but the person is still unresolved or unreconciled over some important issue or with some significant relationship, he or she will tend to linger in order to resolve whatever the disturbing issue is, even though he or she is very uncomfortable or debilitated. On the other hand, when a person is emotionally, spiritually and mentally resolved and ready for this release, but his/her body has not completed its final physical process, the person will continue to live until the physical shut-down is complete.

The experience we call "death" occurs when the body completes its natural process of shutting down and when the spirit completes its natural process of reconciliation and resolution. As you seek to prepare yourself for the death of a loved one, the members of your Hospice Care Team want you to know what to expect and how to respond with support, understanding and ease. This is the great gift of love you have to offer your loved one as this moment approaches.

The physical, emotional, spiritual and mental signs and symptoms of impending death which follow are offered to help you understand the natural things which may happen and how you can respond appropriately. Not all these signs and symptoms will occur with every person, nor will they occur in this particular sequence. Each person is unique, and what has been most characteristic of the way your loved one has lived will most likely be characteristic of his or her death, as well. This is not the time try to change your loved one, but the time to give full acceptance, support and comfort.

Normal Physical Signs and Appropriate Responses

Fluid and Food Decrease: The person may begin to want little or no food or fluid. This means the body is conserving for other functions the energy which would be expended in processing these items. Do not try to force food or drink into the person, or try to use guilt to manipulate them into eating or drinking something. To do this only makes the person much more uncomfortable. Small chips of ice, frozen Gatorade or juice may be refreshing in the mouth. Glycerin swabs may help keep the mouth and lips moist and comfortable. A cool, moist washcloth on the forehead may also increase physical comfort.

Urine Decrease: The person's urine output normally decreases due to the decreased fluid intake as well as the decrease in circulation through the kidneys. Consult your Hospice nurse to determine whether there may be a need to insert or irrigate a catheter.

Incontinence: The person may lose control of urine and/or bowel matter as the muscles in that area begin to relax. Discuss with your Hospice nurse what can be done to protect the bed, and keep your loved one clean and comfortable.

Sleeping: The person may spend an increasing amount of time sleeping and may appear to be uncommunicative and unresponsive. This normal change is due, in part, to changes in the metabolism of the body. Sit down with your loved one, hold his/her hand, do not shake or speak loudly, but speak softly and naturally.

Restlessness: The person may make restless and repetitive motions. This often happens and is due, in part, to the decrease in oxygen circulation to the brain and to metabolism changes. Do not interfere with or try to restrain such motions. To have a calming effect, speak in a quiet, natural way. Lightly massage the forehead, read to the person, or play some soothing music.

Disorientation: The person may seem to be confused about the time, place and identity of people surrounding him/her. This is also due, in part, to the metabolism changes. Identify yourself by name before you speak rather than asking the person to guess who you are. Speak softly, clearly and truthfully when you need to communicate something important for the patient's comfort, such as, "It is time to take your medication," and explain the reason for the communication, such as, "So you won't begin to hurt." Do not use this method to try to manipulate the patient to meet your needs.

Suspicion: The person may become suspicious and not want to take the medicine and may even spit medication out or attempt to hit or kick the family member. Do not attempt to forcibly restrain him or her but speak in a calm, quiet voice and contact your Hospice nurse for further instructions.

Fever: The person may have an elevated temperature. This is usually not due to infection but to changes in metabolism. Your hospice nurse will instruct you in how to give cooling sponge baths and how to administer medication to reduce fever.

Congestion: The person may have sounds coming from his/her chest as though marbles were rolling around inside. This normal change is due to the decrease of fluid intake and an inability to cough up normal secretions. Suctioning usually increases the secretions and causes sharp discomfort. Gently turn the person's head to the side and allow gravity to drain the secretion. You may also gently wipe the mouth with a moist cloth. The sound of the congestion does not indicate the onset of severe or new pain.

Coolness: The person's hands, and then arms and feet, and then legs may become increasingly cool to the touch; and, at the same time, the color of the skin may change. This is a normal indication that the circulation of blood is decreasing to the body's extremities and being reserved for the most vital organs. Keep the person warm with a blanket, but do not use an electric one.

Breathing Pattern Change: The person's regular breathing pattern may change. This is called the "Cheyne-Stokes" symptom which is very common and indicates decrease in circulation in the internal organs. Elevating the head may help bring comfort. Hold his/her hand and speak gently. The person may also have shallow and/or rapid breathing patterns. It is not unusual for the person to experience a rapid heartbeat.

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Normal Emotional/Spiritual/Mental Signs with Appropriate Responses

Withdrawal: The person may seem unresponsive, withdrawn or in a comatose-like state. This indicates preparation for release, a detaching from surroundings and relationships, and a beginning of "letting go." Since hearing remains all the way to the end, speak to your loved one in your normal tone of voice, identify yourself by name when you speak to your loved one in your normal tone of voice, identify yourself by name when you speak, hold his/her hand, and say whatever you need to say that will help the person to "let go."

Vision-like Experiences: The person may speak or claim to have spoken to persons who have already died, or to see or have seen places not presently accessible or visible to you. This does not indicate a hallucination or drug reaction. The person is beginning to detach from this life and is being prepared for the transition, so it will not be frightening. Do not contradict, explain away, belittle or argue about what the person claim to have seen or heard. Just because you

cannot see or hear does not mean it is not real to your loved one. Affirm his/her experience, which is normal and common. If the experience frightens your loved one, explain to him or her that this is normal.

Restlessness: The person may perform repetitive and restless tasks which may indicate that something is still unresolved or unfinished that is disturbing and preventing him/her from letting go. Your Hospice team members will assist you in identifying what may be happening and will help you find ways to help the person find release from the tension or fear. Other things which may be helpful in calming the person are to recall a favorite place or experience the person enjoyed, to read something comforting, to play music, and to give assurance that it is okay to let go.

Fluid and Food Decrease: When a person may want little or no food, this may indicate that the person is ready for the final shutdown. You may help your loved one by giving him/her permission to let go whenever he/she is ready. At the same time, affirm the person's ongoing value to you and the good that you received from him/her which you will carry forward into your life.

Decreased Socialization: The person may want only to be with a very few or even just one person. This is a sign of preparation for release and an affirming from whom support is most needed in order to make the approaching transition. If you are not part of this "inner circle" at the end, it does not mean you are not loved or are unimportant. It means you have already fulfilled your task with him/her, and it is time for you to say "good-bye." If you are part of the final "inner circle" of support, the person needs your affirmation, support and permission to die.

Unusual Communication: The person may make seemingly "out-of character" statements, gestures or requests. This indicates that he/she is ready to say "good-bye" and is testing to see if you are ready to let him/her go. Accept the moment as a beautiful gift when it is offered. Kiss, hug, hold, cry and say whatever you most need to say.

Giving Permission: Giving permission to your loved one to let go without making him/her feel guilty for leaving or trying to keep him/her with you to meet your own needs can be difficult. A dying person will normally try to hold on, even though it brings prolonged discomfort, in order to be sure those who are going to be left behind will be alright. Therefore, your ability to release the dying person from this concern and give him/her assurance that it is all right to let go whenever he/she is ready is one of the greatest gifts you can give your loved one.

Saying Good-bye: When the person is ready to die and you are able to let go, it is time to say "good-bye." Saying "good-bye" is your final gift of love to the loved one, for it achieves closure and makes the final release possible. It may be helpful to lay in bed with the person and hold him/her or take his/her hand and say everything you need to say so that afterward you never have to say to yourself, "Why didn't I say this or that to him/her?" it may be as simple as saying, "I love you." It may include recounting favorite memories, places and activities you shared. It may include saying, "Thank-you for _____." Tears are a normal and natural part of saying "good-bye." Tears do not need to be hidden from your loved one, nor do they require an apology. Tears express your love and help you let go.

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Scriptures for Ministering to the Terminally Ill

(from New International Version)

Job 19:25-27: I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. 26 And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; 27 I myself will see him with my own eyes-I, and not another. How

my heart yearns within me!

Psalms 23: The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. 2 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, 3 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake. 4 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. 5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. 6 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.

Ps 31:5: Into your hands I commit my spirit; redeem me, O LORD, the God of truth.

Ps 31:9-10: 9 Be merciful to me, O LORD, for I am in distress; my eyes grow weak with sorrow, my soul and my body with grief. 10 My life is consumed by anguish and my years by groaning; my strength fails because of my affliction, and my bones grow weak.

Ps 57:1: Have mercy on me, O God, have mercy on me, for in you my soul takes refuge. I will take refuge in the shadow of your wings until the disaster has passed.

Ps 91:1-10: He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say of the LORD, "He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust." 3 Surely he will save you from the fowler's snare and from the deadly pestilence. 4 He will cover you with his feathers, and under his wings you will find refuge; his faithfulness will be your shield and rampart. 5 You will not fear the terror of night, nor the arrow that flies by day, 6 nor the pestilence that stalks in the darkness, nor the plague that destroys at midday. 7 A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you. 8 You will only observe with your eyes and see the punishment of the wicked. 9 If you make the Most High your dwelling--even the LORD, who is my refuge-- 10 then no harm will befall you, no disaster will come near your tent.

Ps 139:1-13: O LORD, you have searched me and you know me. 2 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. 3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. 4 Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD. 5 You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. 7 Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? 8 If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. 9 If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, 10 even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast. 11 If I say, "Surely the darkness will hide me and the light become night around me," 12 even the darkness will not be dark to you; the night will shine like the day, for darkness is as light to you. 13 For you created my inmost being.

Ps 139:23-24: Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. 24 See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Isa 26:3: 3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you.

Ezek 18:32: For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign LORD. Repent and live!

Zech 7:8-9: 8 And the word of the LORD came again to Zechariah: 9 "This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.

John 3:16-18: "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. 17 For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. 18 Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

John 11:21-27: "Lord," Martha said to Jesus, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask." 23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." 24 Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." 25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; 26 and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" 27 "Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."

Rom 8:35: Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword?

Rom 8:37-39: No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. 38 For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, 39 neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

1 Cor 15:54-57

54 When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." 55 "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Col 3:12-17: Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him

Heb 12:2-3: Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Rev 21:1-7: Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. 2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." 5 He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." 6 He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. 7 He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son."