

## Dying at home

### Fact sheet

While the actual time of death is always unpredictable, death in palliative care is seldom unexpected. There should be time to have conversations and make arrangements so that when the person you are caring for dies you will not be left with regrets, and you will know their wishes.

Palliative Care staff, your doctor and community nurse can advise and support you in preparing for a death at home.

#### Things to consider

No matter how well prepared you think you are, the experience of death can be emotional and you may not be thinking clearly. It is a good idea to have worked out in advance what you will need to do, and keep a list next to the phone of who to call and when.

Your doctor will need to provide a certificate of death after the person has died, but may not be able to come immediately.

Discuss beforehand with your doctor whether:

- they are available out of normal hours; and
- if not, who should you contact?

Funeral directors can be contacted when a death is expected to let them know their services will be required in the near future.

#### How will you know that death has occurred?

The moment of death is usually peaceful.

- Breathing which may have been so shallow as to be almost unnoticeable, stops completely;
- The person cannot be roused;
- There will be no heartbeat or pulse;
- Blinking stops and eyelids may be half open;
- Pupils don't change size with light and will become dilated (wide); and
- Skin colour becomes paler and cooler.

#### What should you do?

It is important that you do everything in your own time. There is no legal requirement for you to contact anyone immediately.

- If you don't want to be alone, telephone a relative or friend.
- You **DO NOT** have to ring 000 for the ambulance or the police.
- The person's body can stay at home for several hours if you would like friends and relatives to come and say their goodbyes.
- It is a good idea to turn off room heaters and electric blankets.

- Because the person's body becomes stiff in a few hours, it is important to straighten their limbs and replace dentures.
- It is not necessary to wash the person, but you can sponge away any perspiration or body fluids if you want to. The funeral directors will wash the body completely.
- Phone your doctor to write the death certificate as arranged. If the person dies during the night this can wait until morning.
- When you have the certificate of death and are ready for the person's body to leave the house, contact the funeral director to arrange transport.

## Feelings

You may feel a confusing range of emotions including sadness, fear, panic and relief in no particular order or all at once. This is a common experience. It is also common to feel calm and unemotional. Whatever you feel accept how you are at the time. There is no right or wrong way to be.

## Related Fact Sheets

Care for the dying

Considerations after death

## CONTACT DETAILS

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