When someone is dying

Information for family and friends

Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS
NHS Foundation Trust

When someone is dying
Information for family and friends

The staff at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital are dedicated to providing the best possible care for your relative, friend or partner and yourself at this time.

We aim to provide care in such a way as to respect the dignity, privacy, choices and confidentiality of each patient and his or her family.

We aim to treat each patient as an individual and act as the patient's advocate, in consultation with family and significant others.

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Introduction

This booklet has been written to provide you with information and answer some of the questions that you may have when a member of your family or a close friend is nearing the end of their life. Please feel free to ask staff caring for the patient any questions you may have.

Your relative or friend may be cared for using a 'care of the dying pathway'. This pathway is commonly known as the 'Liverpool Care Pathway' and has been introduced to ensure high standards of care are given to all patients at the end of their life and their families.

When entering this phase of care, those caring for the patient will receive specific guidance on different aspects of care including comfort measures, prescribing of medicines, and discontinuation of inappropriate or unhelpful interventions. The pathway also helps us to recognise and address emotional and spiritual needs and to support partners, families and friends.

If you have any questions regarding the Liverpool Care Pathway please do not hesitate to ask a member of the medical or nursing team caring for your family member or friend.

The hospital team

The hospital team caring for your relative, friend or partner is made up of different professions.

The most senior doctor will be a consultant. Consultants lead a team of junior doctors, co-ordinating all medical aspects of the patient's care. Sometimes this person may be the Consultant in Palliative Care.

Palliative care specifically looks after patients with non-curable diseases, focusing on ensuring that patients are free from pain and other symptoms such as breathlessness and sickness.

The palliative care team will also consider other issues such as psychological, emotional and spiritual wellbeing.

The medical team you are familiar with may continue to be the main team involved with your relative or friend. They will call the palliative care team if they need advice about helping to control any symptoms or giving additional support to you.

Working alongside the Palliative Care Consultant are two specialist palliative care nurses. While supporting patients and family, they also work with the ward nurses to ensure that they are providing the best level of care for the patient.

Within the palliative care team there are other professionals including physiotherapists, occupational therapists, complementary therapists and the Chaplaincy team.

The Chaplaincy team

The multi-faith Chaplaincy team for patients, relatives and friends is available to offer you a confidential listening ear and an opportunity for you to talk through any matters that concern you.

Death and dying are powerful life experiences that affect all of us at some time throughout our lives, and the Chaplaincy team are available to give emotional support and spiritual care to patients, relatives and staff 24 hours a day, 365 days of the year.

The hospital provides chaplains from the Jewish, Muslim, Christian and Humanist religions and also have contacts with other world faiths should you require it.

The Sanctuary and The Chapel on the 1st Floor (Lift Banks B and C respectively) are places of refuge, peace and quiet reflection and are available for you to use 24 hours a day.

Services of Holy Communion (10am) and The Mass (11am) are held every Sunday in The Chapel.

Please let the nursing staff know if you would like to go as they can then arrange for a volunteer and a wheelchair for patients should they wish to attend.

If you would like to see a member of the Chaplaincy team then please speak to the nursing staff who will be able to contact them for you.

The Chaplaincy team will aim to visit you within 24 hours, however they can be contacted more urgently if you would like them to visit sooner.

Chaplaincy team
T: 020 3315 8083 (x58083 internally)
07659 140 566 (for urgent issues)

The last days of life

There are common issues that many patients experience during the dying process.

It can be very hard to accept when someone stops eating and drinking even though we are aware that they are dying. Eventually there will come a time when food and drink is no longer wanted or needed. This is a natural part of the dying process although it may be an anxious time for you.

Feeding and fluids through a drip may not be helpful at this time, but please do discuss this with the medical team if this is of concern to you. Moistening the lips and mouth is all that may be needed.

Please ask the nursing staff how to use the mouthcare tray if you would like to help with this.

Occasionally, you may notice changes in breathing when the patient's condition is deteriorating. You may notice that their breathing becomes noisy. Please be aware that this is not likely to be distressing to the patient but medications can be used to help this.

Although your partner, relative or friend may be unconscious during the final hours and days of life and unable to respond to you, it is possible that they will be aware that you are there and they may be able to hear what you say to them.

For most people, the final moments of life are very peaceful, with a gradual slowing and irregularity of breathing, before it stops. With some people this seems to take a long time, while others may die more quickly.

What can you do to help?

At this time the patient will often be asleep or unconscious and is likely to need regular care. Despite this you should always assume that he or she can still hear and understand everything that you are saying. Therefore do feel free to talk to them.

Do not be afraid to touch your partner, relative or friend, it may be comforting to both of you. If your partner, relative or friend has the sides up around their bed, please ask the nursing staff if these can be lowered while you are sitting next to them. At this time, you may feel that you want to help with the care being given by the hospital team.

This could involve simple mouth or eye care or helping to wash the patient. The nurse caring for your relative or friend will be able to advise and discuss this with you.

Some people wish to die in their own homes, a hospice or a care home. If it is possible, we will do our utmost to help arrange this, however sadly at times some patients are too unwell to be moved from the hospital environment.

Visiting your partner, relative or friend at this time

We would suggest that you discuss visiting times and your individual needs with the nurses on the ward, however we would encourage you to visit your relative or friend at any time. To minimise disturbance to other patients the ward staff may ask you to visit individually or in pairs.

Please respect the privacy and confidentiality of other patients on the ward. Children are welcome to visit. If you feel unsure about this, discuss it with the nursing staff.

Visiting can be very tiring. It is understandable to be worried and to feel helpless at this time but it is important to take care of yourself. Try to rest as often as possible and eat sensibly and we suggest that if there are enough of you around then perhaps take it in turns to be at the bedside.

Often relatives and friends feel it is important for them to remain with the patient all the time in case their condition changes. Sometimes a patient's condition can deteriorate unexpectedly and relatives or friends cannot always be present at the time of death.

It can be helpful to talk to someone about what you are going through. You may wish to speak with your own GP. The ward nursing staff and/or nurse specialists may be able to support you at this time alternatively you may like to talk to one of the hospital chaplains, or a representative from your own place of worship.

You may find that you have time for a massage or reflexology session or further support in our Macmillan Centre located in the Medical Day Unit on the Ground Floor, Lift Bank D. These can often help carers to relax and can give you time and space to digest what is going on (please note that sessions can be limited and sometimes not available).

Staying overnight with your partner, relative or friend

You may wish to stay with your relative, friend or partner overnight—please discuss this with a member of staff on the ward. There are also a few private rooms available for a moderate charge in the hospital at the Patient's Hotel which is located on the 2nd Floor of the hospital—please speak to a member of staff on the ward if you would like to book a room.

When a patient dies

It is our intention that your partner, relative or friend and you will receive the best possible care before and after their death. After death the nurses will allow you to spend time with your partner, relative or friend if you would like to do so.

A short time later a member of the hospital team will come and certify the death. The nurses who have been caring for your relative or friend will prepare them for removal to the hospital mortuary.

At all times we aim to respect dignity and individual faith requests. Once they have been moved to the mortuary you will have the opportunity to visit your relative, friend or partner again in the Chapel of Rest by arranging this with the Bereavement Adviser.

You will be given a copy of the Trust's booklet *What Needs to be Done*. In this booklet there is further information to guide and assist you with additional support, as well as the Bereavement Adviser's details as you will need to contact them the next working day to arrange an appointment to see them (please note that if things need to be done more quickly for religious reasons, other arrangements can be made).

Bereavement can be a shattering experience. The death of someone close can leave feelings of anger, numbness, tiredness and helplessness as well as a deep sadness. Coming to terms with your loss can be a long process.

We are able to offer bereavement counselling here at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital via The Macmillan Centre which offers the service in conjunction with Cruse Bereavement Care. To make an appointment, simply call 020 3315 2386.

Practical issues

Making enquiries

The main hospital switchboard number is 020 8746 8000. When connected ask to be put through to the ward where your relative, friend or partner is being cared for. If you are unsure of the name of the ward someone on reception will be able to help you.

You can also find a list of wards and telephone numbers in the Services section of our website www.chelwest.nhs.uk.

To reduce the amount of telephone calls that ward staff sometimes receive, we would ask family and friends to nominate one person who can phone the ward and pass on information to family and friends.

At times it may be necessary to restrict the amount of information that staff give over the telephone. This is in order to maintain the confidentiality of the patient.

The hospital team caring for the patient will be able to discuss care and treatment with you in person.

If you would like to talk to a member of the team caring for your relative, friend or partner, you only need to ask a member of the ward-based team and this can be arranged.

Transport and parking

Information explaining bus and tube routes to the hospital is available at reception. The hospital has limited parking spaces and queues often occur especially late morning (after 10am) and early afternoon. Close relatives of the patient may be eligible for concessionary parking rates. Please ask the nursing staff regarding this.

For further information please see the 'Getting to the Hospital' page in the 'Your Hospital Visit' section of our website www.chelwest.nhs.uk.

Using telephones

As a general rule, mobile phones may be used in the public areas of the hospital (ie outside of ward entrances) but not where patients are being cared for. If you are unsure where mobile phones may be used then ask a member of staff.

Please ensure that mobile phones are switched off while on the ward as they can interfere with medical equipment.

All beds on the wards are equipped with Hospedia. Hospedia is a communication system which includes TV, radio and a telephone that patients and visitors have access to. To operate these you need to purchase a prepaid card from one of the machines on each ward. Please ask staff on the ward for more advice should you need it.

Pay phones are located on the ground floor of the hospital. The ward staff may be able to help you with making telephone calls upon request.

Meals and refreshments

The restaurant can be found on the Lower Ground Floor near Lift Bank D. Opening times are:

- Mon–Fri, 7:30am–5pm

There is also a Costa Coffee on the Ground Floor of the hospital. It is open 7am–7:30pm on weekdays and 7am–5pm at the weekend.

There are various shops and restaurants close to the hospital.

Interpreting service

We are able to book interpreters for patients and families who are unable to communicate in English.

Toilet facilities

There are several public toilets located on the ground floor of the hospital, however you may not wish to leave the ward so please ask a nurse on the ward for access to nearby facilities.

Tell us what you think

We hope that you will be satisfied with the care that you and your relative, friend or partner receive while at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital. However, should there be any problems, it is important that they are dealt with quickly. Please talk to the staff on duty if you should have any concerns.

Membership and Patient Advice & Liaison Service (M-PALS)

As a patient, relative or carer, sometimes you may need to turn to someone for on-the-spot help, advice and support. The hospital M-PALS team provide a confidential service, helping you to sort our any concerns you may have about the care we provide, guiding you through different services available from the NHS.

The team act independently when handling patient and family concerns, liaising with staff, managers and, where appropriate, relevant organisations, to negotiate immediate or prompt solutions.

If necessary, the M-PALS team can also refer patients and families to specific local or national-based support agencies.

M-PALS is confidential and can be contacted Mon–Fri, 9am–5pm on 020 3315 6727. The office is situated on the Ground Floor, immediately behind the main reception at the front entrance of the hospital.

You may also write to:

Chief Executive
Chelsea and Westminster Hospital
369 Fulham Road
London
SW10 9NH

In addition, you can give us your views by completing a comment card at the M-PALS office—alternatively you can complete our feedback form which is accessible from the 'Membership & Advice' page in the 'Your Hospital Visit' section of our website www.chelwest.nhs.uk.

Acknowledgements

This booklet was developed by staff, patients and carers as part of the Liverpool Care Pathway Steering Group based at Chelsea and Westminster Hospital.

We are extremely grateful to the Friends of Chelsea and Westminster Hospital for funding this publication.

In addition, thanks go to the Cancer & Palliative Care Team for their help and contributions.

For further copies please contact:

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July 2011