

Managing Pain

A Caregiver and Patient Training



Physical pain is a common problem for many patients who have a serious illness. As the caregiver for a hospice patient, you are a part of the hospice team. You have the important role of observing, communicating and responding to the patient's pain management needs. If your loved one is in a facility, your role is to communicate with facility staff about your loved one's level of comfort. As a concerned caregiver, you may observe things that facility staff or hospice team members do not observe. Knowing what to report and when to report about pain is an essential part of making sure your loved one has the highest level of comfort possible. Your input will help the team to develop an excellent plan of care for the patient.

What are signs and symptoms of pain?

Pain is whatever your loved one says it is and it occurs whenever they say it does. Pain can be described as acute or chronic, depending on how long it lasts. Acute pain is sudden or short-duration pain that is experienced from a broken leg, surgery, or other trauma. Chronic pain is pain that lasts for longer than 3 months and can last for months or even years. Pain can affect appetite and sleep/rest.

Even patients who are not able to communicate may show signs of pain. **Nonverbal signs of pain are grimacing, crying, moaning, restlessness, or rubbing/clutching a body part.** Lying in bed for long periods of time is often uncomfortable, even if moved regularly. Immobility puts extra pressure on the spinal column which causes back pain that can be very uncomfortable for patients. Immobility leads to pain and stiffness in the joints which may not be treated unless the caregiver is aware of the non-verbal symptoms.

What will help?

Your loved one is the focus of the hospice team's plan of care which is individualized to best manage your loved one's comfort. There are several treatments which hospice experts use in order to improve the level of comfort for your loved one. **Treatment options consist of medications, complementary therapies such as essential oils (creams and tablets), meditation and massage.** Keeping track of changes in the frequency and intensity of pain and communicating this information to the team can help the team to adjust treatment plans as needed to improve pain management. It is also important for the team to know how pain affects you and your loved one.

Your hospice team can help with pain.

The hospice team can provide you or your loved one with guidance in management of pain. Each team member has been trained to observe and provide effective treatment. There are a number of medications, and alternatives to medicine that can be prescribed to ease pain. Talk with your hospice nurse and physician about medication options and alternative treatments for pain. Many alternative methods do not have side effects and can be very effective in managing pain levels. They can make a difference in loved one's level of alertness and this may improve quality of life. If at any time – day or night- the patient is uncomfortable because of pain, please call hospice 704-873-4719 for help.

How is pain managed?

Hospice physician and nurse practitioners prescribe medications based on the three levels described by the World Health Organization, (WHO). The 3 levels of pain are mild, moderate, and severe. When treating mild pain, your nurse or physician may recommend the use of medications such as acetaminophen (Tylenol), aspirin or ibuprofen. When these medications are not effective in reducing pain an opioid may be added to the medication regimen.

Typically the following medications are used for the moderate pain:

- Hydrocodone
- Oxycodone

Pain that lasts day and night will require around-the-clock medications. When the pain level becomes severe, your doctor may order the following opioid pain medications:

- Morphine
- Hydromorphone
- Fentanyl

Common side effects of medications

There are 4 main side effects that occur with use of opioids.

If any of these side effects occur, contact your hospice nurse before making changes to your medicines or diet.

1. Constipation is one of four symptoms that will continue while you are on opioids so preventing constipation is necessary. Without proper preventive measures, patients taking pain meds will have discomfort from constipation. The following can help to prevent constipation: a) drink plenty of fluids, b) eat fruit and prunes, and c) add a laxative if recommended by your hospice nurse or doctor.
2. Nausea is a side effect that is temporary. Usually 2-3 days of therapy will break the cycle.
3. Sleepiness is a frequent side effect; sleepiness will usually lessen over time but finding a balance between comfort and alertness is sometimes difficult.
4. Itching is another side effect of opioids. Benadryl may be useful to relieve itching.

Call hospice if your loved one is not responding to the medication regimen.

References:

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Call Hospice First
(704) 873-4719
Our team is available 24/7