

Final moments

For most people their final moments are peaceful and without suffering. Breathing becomes slower with long pauses between breaths. Sometimes the person may die quickly and other times the process may take some time. Even if the person is unable to respond, they may still hear what is happening and know who is around them, so it is important to continue to speak to them and tell them how you feel. Staff will support everybody throughout this process. If patients, relatives or friends have any questions at any time it is important to ask a member of the nursing team. We understand that this is a difficult time and our aim is to provide care and support to all involved.

When Death Occurs

If you are not present the ward staff will contact you. The ward team will telephone the doctor and inform them of the death of your loved one. The doctor will certify the death and our staff will inform you of what to do next. We do not have a mortuary service on site at our hospitals so will contact a local funeral director who is contracted to provide mortuary services and you will be given details of this provider by ward staff. Families are of course welcome to choose their own funeral director who will liaise with our own mortuary provider regarding your chosen arrangements. In some cases the death is referred to the Coroner, these circumstances are fairly common. The Coroner's office will arrange for your loved one to be taken to a local hospital mortuary and will contact you further when they are able to, normally within 24 working hours (Mon-Fri), but it may vary. Please do not hesitate at any time to speak to the ward staff or contact the ward if you have any queries.

Patient Experience Team

If you have any concerns or need advice about accessing NHS services, you can speak in confidence to the Patient Experience Team on [0800 085 7935](tel:08000857935) or you can email epunft.pals@nhs.uk

This leaflet can be produced in large print, CD, Braille and other languages on request.



Essex Partnership University NHS Foundation Trust regards equality and diversity as integral to the way it works. Our staff will ensure that everyone is treated fairly and no one is discriminated against on the basis of their ethnicity, gender, disability, age, sexual orientation and religion or belief.

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Care in Last Few Days of Life



Information for patients,
families and carers

In the last few days of life there are physical and emotional changes that a person may experience. For each person it will be different and not always easy to foresee exactly which course the changes will take or how quickly they will occur. The important thing is to be able to spend time together, comfortably, without suffering and be prepared for what to expect.

Signs

There are common signs that may suggest whether a person is entering the terminal phase of life. It may be useful to be aware of these:

- increasing weakness and fatigue;
- less able to move around and requiring more help getting up from the chair or bed;
- wanting to be in bed and feeling drowsy when awake and needing to sleep more of the time;
- loss of appetite and unable to eat because the body is not able to digest food that it does not need;
- feeling a little disorientated and dreaming about people from the past who may have died. This usually occurs as a person starts thinking about past times and the people in their lives;
- less able to communicate;
- require assistance with personal care.

Personalised care

We will continue to assess people as individuals throughout their time in our care including in their final hours, using a personalised care plan. This is inclusive of family members so all have an understanding of what is happening. Any treatments given will focus on ensuring comfort, reducing suffering and avoiding any unnecessary invasive interventions so the person can experience a peaceful, comfortable and natural death. We will implement this in the following ways:

Personal care - That the person is assessed and appropriate help with all hygiene needs is arranged. We believe it is important to help to maintain the dignity and identity of the person.

Mouth care - A person's mouth will often become dry, which can cause discomfort. This may be due to medication, reduced food and fluid intake and the body not producing enough saliva. This can be helped by moistening the mouth regularly and applying balm to the lips.

Skin care - Skin can be moistened with moisturiser regularly throughout the day. Like the mouth, the skin may also become dry and moisturising the skin will help to prevent soreness.

Emotional care - This is a highly emotional time for everyone in the family and for friends, and time to be together is extremely important. We will support you during visits and can refer you to other appropriate services if there are needs for palliative specialist support identified.

Medication - As people become weaker and sleepier, and tablets more difficult to swallow we may change to a syringe driver this is a portable pump that administers the medication over a 24-hour period. This administers medication through a needle into the skin ensuring that any symptoms can be treated continuously and effectively.

Restlessness and agitation- Sometimes restlessness and agitation can occur, which may be due to bodily changes and the dying process. We can manage this usually with light sedatives which will help the person relax and not experience this unpleasant symptom.

Pain - Sometimes people ask how we can tell that a person unable to communicate is in pain. There are signs that a person may be in pain which may include wincing, restlessness or generally appearing distressed. We will assess and monitor this regularly and if at any time there is discomfort or suffering we can help with medications to relax and ease the pain.

Breathing changes - There are often changes to a person's breathing as their condition progresses, for example it can become more irregular and often slower. This is normal and at this stage people are likely to be less conscious and unaware of the changes.

