

We can help

Each member of your care team plays a special role in your loved one's care. You may have met many of these staff members. If you would like to talk to anyone again, or if there is someone you would like to meet, please tell your nurse.

Transitions and Life Choices (TLC) consult team: A nurse, doctor, social worker and chaplain who help manage symptoms and give special support to very ill patients and their families. Available at Fairview Ridges Hospital, Fairview Southdale Hospital and Fairview-University Medical Center.

Social worker: Can assess patient and family needs and arrange for services. Helps patients and families understand and cope with difficult issues that arise.

Chaplain: Offers spiritual, religious and ethical support. Can help you find a faith leader from your own faith tradition. On-call for emergencies.

Patient relations: A staff member works to resolve concerns about hospital care, policies and procedures.

Advance directives or living wills: All of the above staff members can help your loved one complete an advance directive.

Family conferences: If something is not clear or you need better communication with the care team, you may ask for a family conference. Contact the nurse or social worker on your patient care unit.

Ethics committee: If you and your family face choices that involve ethical concerns, you may wish to speak with the ethics committee. This is a group of health experts who offer advice and information. To set up a meeting, talk to a member of your care team.

Interpreter services: We offer interpreters for patients who are deaf, hard-of-hearing or who have limited English skills. If you need an interpreter, contact the social work department or tell a member of your care team.

Connecting Patients and Families During a Life-Threatening Illness

When Your Loved One Is in the Hospital

This is a very hard time for you, your family and your loved one. You may be facing difficult decisions. Our goals are to support you and your family, answer your questions and give you the care you need at this time. We want to help you make your time together as meaningful and comfortable as possible.

In these pages you will find a list of helpful resources, along with ideas on how you might:

- create a homelike environment in the hospital
- spend quality time together
- make memories
- help children stay close to their loved one

We hope these ideas will bring some comfort to you and your family.

Creating a home-like environment

We know that being in the hospital is very different from being at home. When your loved one is ill or dying, the staff needs special equipment and space to provide the care your loved one requires.

Still, there are ways to make the hospital room more comfortable and familiar. For example, you may bring in:

- Freshly washed quilts and pillows
- Pictures
- Favorite CDs
- Stuffed animals
- Food from home or a favorite restaurant
- Decorations for holidays
- A special pet (ask the nurse if it's okay)

“He always loved the picture of his home town. . . . We put it on his bedside table, then folded the quilt at the bottom of the bed.”

“She wasn’t eating, but when we brought in the food from home, she took a couple of bites.”

“The picture of Dad on the Canadian fishing trip brought back many memories. Until then, he had never talked to the doctors about his hobbies. One of the residents had gone to the same lake, and they talked about fishing the day before Dad died. It is a special memory for us.”



Spending time together

Family members may spend many hours with a sick loved one. Even if your loved one is very ill, hearing the voices of family and friends can bring great comfort. The sense of hearing may be there, even if your loved one cannot respond.

To interact with your loved one and other family members:

- Talk about the weather or your daily activities.
- Watch favorite movies, home videos and TV programs.
- Read aloud (books, magazines, newspapers).
- Play board and card games.
- Look through scrapbooks and photo albums. Tell stories and talk about your memories.
- Pull a chair near the bed, or sit close to your loved one on the bed.

“My son turned on the football game. This was something we usually did on Sunday afternoons. I’m not sure if Frank knew what was on the TV, but for the rest of the family, it seemed to help. We were still able to do some of the same things.”

“Listening to classical music and reading the New York Times was something we always did. I brought in her favorite CD and read aloud to her. Her breathing seemed easier, somehow.”

Arranging private time

At the hospital, you may have many caregivers coming in and out of the room. But you can often arrange a time for privacy.

- Talk with the nurse about the best time to be alone.
- Post a sign on the door.

Palliative care (TLC) kits

Ask a staff member about the “palliative care kit.” This is a special kit that contains music CDs, a CD player, massage lotion, essential oils and other items. You may use these to comfort your loved one.

The kit includes information about dying and talking to children about death. It also includes a book of meditations and prayers.

Making memories

When a loved one is facing the end of life, every day is precious. Many families use this time to record who this person is and what his or her life has been like. You may want to:

- Make a collage or handprint. (Ask your care team if materials are available.)
- Save a lock of hair.
- Use audio or video recorders to capture stories and memories.
- Interview your loved one about what has been important in his or her life. Find out what values and beliefs your loved one would like to share with others.
- Keep a memory journal or notebook on the bedside stand. Visitors can sign it and leave messages.

“We left the memories journal at his bedside. One of the neighbors stopped by and wrote down the date and time of his visit and one of the jokes Uncle John used to tell. . . .”

Rituals

Your family may have rituals and traditions that are important to you. These may center on your belief systems, holidays, rites of passage, hobbies or interests.

Hospital chaplains can support your traditions. They may offer you books, music or ritual objects. They may connect you with support groups or your faith community. They will even help you create rituals that reflect your culture, religious beliefs and family traditions.

“The chaplain gathered us all together around his bed. She encouraged us to share a special memory of our family time. We prayed and sang.”

Helping children stay connected

Children may not know what to expect at the hospital. Before the first visit, describe what the room will look like. Staff can help arrange the room so the equipment looks less scary.

Talk about how the children can talk to or interact with your loved one. Some children may prefer to wait outside the room with a trusted friend. Let each child decide.

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