



PATIENT / FAMILY TEACHING SHEETS

PSYCHOLOGICAL DISTRESS

What is Psychological Distress?

- Uneasy feelings of anxiety or depression in response to a specific demand that results in temporary or permanent harm

What are the Signs and Symptoms of Psychological Distress?

- Feelings of anxiety, sadness, anger
- Feeling “out of control” much of the time
- Difficulty coping with every day problems
- Unable to talk about ways to solve problems or talk about fears
- Needing the help of others to make decisions
- Wanting to be alone
- Trouble sleeping
- Not taking care of self
- Looking sad, frowning. Crying easily
- Laughing at odd times
- Loss of hope or sense of comfort
- Aches and pain
- Feeling that your heart is racing
- Thoughts of suicide or hastening death
- Not wanting to follow the advice of the team

What to Report to the Hospice/Palliative Care Team

- Any signs of behaviors listed above
- Talking about suicide
- Past depression and medications taken for depression
- Lack of interest in self or life in general

- If you experience a new problem
- If a current problem is getting worse and the present medication does not seem to be working
- Side effects of medications

What can be done for Psychological Distress?

Psychological distress is common with terminal diseases, especially if physical symptoms are present. We want you to be physically comfortable. There is a direct link between how one feels physically and how one feels psychologically and emotionally.

Patients and Family

- Do not feel that you are bothering the team by asking questions
- Asking questions means you care

Patient

- You may not feel up to talking with many people. You may want to have one person to talk to whom you trust
- Try to have a daily routine
- Take all of your medications as ordered

Family

- Provide calm, relaxing setting
- Be flexible. The patient may want to talk one day. The next day he/she may need quiet and calm
- Be willing to be with them without having to “do” something
- If needed, help with medications
- Report any medication side effects or behaviors that are different
- Treat the patient with dignity and respect
- Don't be afraid to ask for help. Do not be hard on yourself with comments like “I should have done this or that” or “I should have known that”
- As much as you can, enjoy this time together and look for ways to make memories

Other HPNA Patient / Family Teaching Sheets are available at www.hpna.org.

Reference

***Core Curriculum for the Generalist Hospice and Palliative Nurse.* Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company; 2005.**

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