



PATIENT/FAMILY TEACHING SHEET

MANAGING RESTLESSNESS

What is restlessness?

- An inability to rest, relax, or concentrate
- Extreme restlessness is sometimes called agitation
- A condition that occurs in nearly half of all patients during the last 48 hours of life

What are signs that the patient is restless?

- Muscle twitching
- Moving around without a known reason
- Pulling at sheets, covers or clothing
- Trying to get out of bed for no known reason
- Fidgeting
- Sleeplessness
- Inability to get comfortable
- Grimacing

What to report to the Hospice/Palliative Care Team?

- Any of the signs or behaviors of the patient listed above
- Inability of the person to swallow medications
- Things that make the restlessness worse (for example – loud music)
- Things that make the restlessness better (for example – soft music)
- Concerns that you may have as caregiver (what will help you cope with the restlessness)
- Need for spiritual support for the patient or caregiver
- Situations that might be unsafe (for example, the need for side rails to keep the patient in bed)

What can be done?

The team will try to find the reason for the restlessness and talk with you about treatments.

Things you can do:

- Give medications to the patient as ordered
- Offer frequent reassurance to the patient
- Remain with the restless person as much as possible
- Offer relaxation activities if the patient is alert and oriented
- Play soothing music that the patient likes
- Keep things calm around the patient (for example, decrease numbers of visitors)
- Read favorite stories, poems, etc. to your loved one in a calm voice
- Do gentle massage, comforting touches, or other things to calm the patient
- Keep the patient safe (for example, do not leave the patient alone while restless)

Understand that restlessness may be a sign that the patient is close to death – let other family members know what is happening

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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