

# Holy Redeemer Hospice

## *Guidelines for Providing Care during the Dying Process*

### *Medications*

- Talk with your hospice nurse about which medications are most important during the last stages of an illness. Often, certain medications are not necessary while other comfort medications become more important.
- Keep giving medications that have been ordered to control symptoms such as pain, breathing difficulty, congestion, or anxiety or restlessness. While your loved one may not be able to communicate with words, the symptoms may still be present.
- Watch for nonverbal signs of discomfort such as grimacing and muscle tension. 'Moaning' or other sounds may not be the most reliable sign of discomfort during this stage as these sounds may be a result of breathing changes rather than discomfort. A relaxed face is typically a sign of comfort and peace.
- Notify the hospice team if any nonverbal signs of discomfort do not respond to the medications that were ordered.

### *Positioning*

- It is important to move your loved one in order to avoid preventable skin breakdown and relieve congestion that has settled in the back of the throat. Generally, you will want to change the position your loved one every two hours.
- Position changes can involve elevating or lowering the head of the bed slightly; elevating or lowering the foot of the bed slightly; or turning your loved one on to their side with the use of pillows to keep them in the new position.
- When providing any type of food, liquid, or medication, it is important to have the head of the bed elevated for at least 30 minutes afterwards.

### *Mouth Care*

- As your loved one eats and drinks less, it becomes important to keep your loved one's mouth clean and moist.
- Water or other favorite drink can be used to moisten the mouth by placing a few drops in a straw or oral syringe; or by moistening a toothette sponge.
- Ointments and lip balm can be used to keep the lips moist and prevent cracking. Avoid petroleum based ointments (for example, Vaseline) if your loved one uses oxygen.

### *Skin Care*

- Keeping the skin clean and dry helps to avoid preventable skin breakdown and will also keep your loved one as comfortable as possible.
- Use moisturizing soaps for cleaning.
- Liberally apply moisturizing lotions to dry skin as needed.