ST. FRANCIS 24/7 CALL CENTER: (321) 269-4240

St. Francis REFLECTIONS® Hospice
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Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD)

COPD is a progressive disease that blocks airflow, leading to breathing difficulties. It includes chronic bronchitis and emphysema, characterized by damaged airways and loss of lung elasticity.

Common Symptoms:

Symptoms may differ from person to person

- A chronic productive cough (often called "smoker's cough")
- Shortness of breath
- Wheezing
- Frequent lung infections
- Difficulty performing simple activities due to breathlessness

Causes:

Potential causes:

- Long-term exposure to lung irritants, primarily smoking. Other causes include air pollution, workplace chemicals, and genetic conditions like alpha-1 antitrypsin deficiency.

Hospice Considerations:

COPD cannot be cured but treatments include bronchodilators, corticosteroids, and oxygen therapy to alleviate symptoms. Smoking cessation is critical to slowing disease progression.

- **Frequent Exacerbations:** When the patient experiences frequent or severe exacerbations that do not respond well to standard treatments.
- **Advanced Disease:** When the disease progresses to the point where the patient is severely limited in their daily activities and is experiencing persistent breathing difficulties.

- **Comfort and Quality of Life:** When the focus shifts from curative treatment to improving comfort and managing end-of-life symptoms.

Symptom Management Tips:

- **Breathlessness:** Encourage use of inhalers and oxygen therapy. Fan therapy (directing a fan towards the face) can reduce the sensation of breathlessness.
- **Coughing:** Expectorants to loosen mucus and avoid irritants like smoke or strong perfumes.
- **Energy conservation:** Encourage small, frequent meals and short, manageable activities. Pacing oneself can help prevent exacerbating breathlessness.
- **Emotional well-being:** COPD can cause anxiety related to difficulty breathing. Techniques like diaphragmatic breathing or relaxation exercises may help.

How to Help:

- **Patient Tips:**
  - **Pacing:** Break tasks into smaller steps and rest often to avoid breathlessness.
  - **Breathing Exercises:** Practice pursed-lip breathing or diaphragmatic breathing to improve airflow.
  - **Avoid Triggers:** Stay away from smoke, dust, and strong smells to reduce respiratory irritation.

- **Caregiver Tips:**
  - **Environment Control:** Keep the home cool and free of pollutants or allergens.
  - **Monitor Oxygen:** Help the patient use supplemental oxygen correctly and monitor for changes in breathing.
  - **Stay Calm:** In moments of breathlessness, offer calm, reassuring guidance through breathing exercises.

St. Francis Reflections is always available to assist with any questions or concerns 24/7

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