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

St. Francis REFLECTIONS® Hospice
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End-Stage Cancer

End-stage cancer, also known as terminal cancer, refers to cancer that has progressed to a point where curative treatment is no longer effective. It has typically spread to multiple organs or parts of the body (metastasis). Cancer staging refers to the extent of cancer in the body, ranging from Stage 1 (localized) to Stage 4 (metastatic). End-stage cancer is generally Stage 4.

Common Symptoms:

Symptoms may differ from person to person

- Pain
- Fatigue
- Shortness of breath
- Difficulty eating
- Weight loss
- Nausea
- Constipation
- Confusion, and emotional distress.

Causes:

Potential causes:

- Cancer develops due to uncontrolled growth of abnormal cells, which can invade surrounding tissues or spread to other parts of the body through the blood or lymphatic systems.

Hospice Considerations:

- **Uncontrolled Symptoms:** When the patient has persistent, unmanageable symptoms like severe pain, nausea, or shortness of breath.
- **Frequent Hospitalizations:** When the patient is frequently hospitalized due to cancer-related complications, it may be time to consider hospice care.
- **Declining Functional Status:** If the patient becomes bedridden, loses the ability to care for themselves, or shows significant weight loss and weakness.

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- **End-of-Life Decisions:** When the focus of care shifts from attempting curative treatments to prioritizing comfort and quality of life.

Symptom Management Tips:

- **Pain:** Pain management is critical. Opioids (i.e. morphine) are commonly used. Ensure timely administration and adjust as needed under medical guidance.
- **Breathing Issues:** Shortness of breath is common. Provide oxygen therapy as applicable, elevate the head, and keep the room well-ventilated. Use a fan to blow cool air across the patient's face, which can alleviate feelings of breathlessness.
- **Fatigue:** Encourage the patient to rest as much as needed. Fatigue at this stage is severe, and it's essential to conserve energy for meaningful activities or interactions.
- **Nausea and Vomiting:** Anti-nausea medications (i.e. ondansetron) can help manage symptoms, along with small, frequent meals or avoiding strong odors.

How to Help:

- **Patient Tips:**
  - **Comfort Measures:** Focus on what makes you most comfortable, whether it's spending time with loved ones, listening to music, or resting.
  - **Communication:** Express your feelings, fears, and preferences for end-of-life care. Communicating your wishes can bring peace of mind.
  - **Energy Conservation:** Save your energy for activities that matter most to you. Ask for help with tasks that feel overwhelming.

- **Caregiver Tips:**
  - **Medication Schedule:** Keep a consistent schedule for medications to ensure that pain and other symptoms are managed effectively.
  - **Comfort First:** Focus on the patient's comfort above all else. This may involve adjusting their position, providing pain relief, or simply holding their hand.
  - **Emotional Availability:** Be present emotionally. Sometimes, your quiet presence is more helpful than words. Offer love and understanding during difficult moments.
  - **Get Help:** Don't hesitate to reach out to hospice or other family members for support when caregiving becomes overwhelming.

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

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