

SUPPORT AND INFORMATION FOR PEOPLE LIVING WITH A TERMINAL ILLNESS

Introduction

This booklet offers advice and information for people affected by an illness or condition which doctors think cannot be cured and which is likely to bring their life to an end. It is also for those who are caring for someone in these circumstances. It includes information about medical care, practical support and benefits which are available to make life easier both for those who have an illness and for the people closest to them. Especially their main carer. It is based on the principle that illness and caring are part of life and living, and that every encouragement should be given to help people live with dignity and as fully as possible throughout the course of an illness.

About Caring

Many people may give help to those who have a terminal illness and to their carers. These include GP's, hospital staff, support groups and voluntary agencies. Ministers of religion, friends and families may all offer moral support and comfort. It should be remembered that 24-hour caring can prove very difficult for the carer. No carer should feel guilty if he or she feel unable to bear the whole burden of care. Whilst the patient is likely to be everyone's care and concern, everyone, including the carer him or herself, should consider what the carer's needs are. These needs, such as the need for time off or for moral support or counseling, can be listed by the carer and shared with a nurse, doctor, or other caring person.

Some carers' needs may be in opposition to the needs or views of the patient, for example, with regard to respite care. Both have weight.

About being a patient

Any particular patient will have to decide how best to come to terms with their situation. A friendly ear or counseling help can be asked for and may be found amongst family and friends. An understanding of what medical treatment is available and how it works may be helpful and is essential in making informed decisions.

Taking up practical services on offer is probably one of the most useful things a patient can do. Another is for the patient to think about, identify and clearly state his or her own needs and views.

HEALTH CARE

Your Family Doctor, or General Practitioner (GP)

Your first contact is likely to be with your GP. He/she may send you to hospital for tests or treatment. If it is decided to give medication only then this can be prescribed by the GP. Whilst the hospital doctor will be responsible for any treatment received in hospital, the GP will take care of day-to-day problems and can prescribe medication to ease symptoms as they arise. If any problem is becoming troublesome do not hesitate to ask your GP for help and advice. Many symptoms can be relieved to a greater or lesser extent, including the following:

Pain	Constipation	Diarrhoea	Fits	Difficult Breathing
Odour	Spasms	Hiccoughs	Movement loss	Vomiting
Swelling	Incontinence	Sores	Bleeding	Appetite loss

Likewise for persistent anxiety, depression or feelings of anger the GP may be able to help, or you may obtain support and advice from a support group, voluntary agency or counselor.

