



DOVER PARK HOSPICE
Every Moment Matters

Being a Caregiver



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Introduction

As you provide dedicated care for your loved one in their final journeys, you will need to carry out nursing care to ensure their dignity and comfort.

This guide is intended for Dover Park patients, whether at home or in our inpatient services.

It walks you through the role of a caregiver and prepares you for the journey ahead. It introduces tips to maintain connection with your loved one all the way through to their final moments.

It is intended to inform and empower you, even as you are supported by our clinical team. Where in doubt, please approach our clinical team.

Roles of a Caregiver

A Caregiver is the person who consistently assumes the responsibility of caring for the patient.

The duties of caregivers can be challenging, overwhelming, stressful, frustrating and some may even face isolation in the process of their caregiving duties. On the flip side, caregiving can be very meaningful, fulfilling and rewarding.

Given adequate physical and emotional support, information on illness progression and skills to cope with new challenges, caregivers can be empowered to journey with their loved ones positively. Caregiving can also bring families closer.

Listed below are some of the duties of caregivers. It may vary with patients' illness, needs and families' available resources.

Main Duties

Medication

This is particularly applicable for patients in our Home Care service. Many patients have multiple medications. Depending on the underlying illness, the Medical Team may stop some medications to reduce the pill burden. It is essential for caregivers to learn the different medications, dosages and purpose of the medications. Caregivers need to administer medications, keep track of the supply and note down all additional doses of painkillers given each day.

Bed Transfer

For patients who are bedridden or need help in bathing or transferring, it is essential that the caregiver uses the correct techniques of moving the patient to avoid hurting themselves. Caregivers can learn techniques from the team to help in their daily care giving routine. For some patients, hospital beds or pressure relieving mattresses may be recommended.

Meals and Diet

Eating a well-balanced diet helps to maintain patient's energy level. This in turn improves the wellbeing of the patient. Thus it is important that the patient is given appropriate daily meals. Encourage the patient to eat multiple small meals rather than 3 main meals a day. Consult the Medical Team on the suitability of patient's meals as some may experience change in their sense of taste or difficulties in swallowing. Changes in patients' diet may be recommended in case of disease progression. For some patients, tube feeding may be recommended.

Information on Illness Progression

Caregiving can create uncertainty and a sense of helplessness as needs of the patient changes with disease progression. Hence it is important for caregivers to seek regular and relevant information to be in control of the situation and attend to patient's needs with more confidence and ease.

Financial Difficulties

If your family is facing financial difficulties, either due to patient's illness or other circumstances, you may speak to social workers to discuss your financial constraints. This will ease your anxiety about the financial constraints that you are facing in the midst of caregiving.

Medical Appointments

Some patients may have several medical appointments for various treatments and follow up. Make a list of the important appointments and prioritize them. You may need to make arrangements for another person to come along to provide assistance or help out with your child care arrangement while you are away at hospital for appointments. Keep the medical team updated of the medical appointments.

Unfinished Matters

Your loved one's days are limited and he may want to settle some things in his life while he is articulate. If you are comfortable, you may speak to your loved one about his/her wishes or you may seek help from friends, relatives or the Home Care Team to approach the matter sensitively. Adopt an open mind and allow your loved ones to share his thoughts and honor his wishes as far as possible. This may allow some family members to reconcile differences, experience healing or even proper closure of certain issues.

Tips for Caregivers

Many caregivers tend to neglect themselves due to stress or lack of time for themselves. Caregivers are often overlooked and they may have no one to turn to with their own concerns.

Caregiving is not a 9-to-5 job with lunch breaks and weekends off. It is a tedious and continuous job. Caregivers need to take conscious breaks from their routine.

Try to make time to:

- ✓ Exercise
- ✓ Chat with friends over coffee
- ✓ Meditate
- ✓ Get spiritual support
- ✓ Listen to music or read a good book
- ✓ Catch up on sleep

Setting aside some time for yourself allows you to carry on your journey of caregiving with more ease and less anxiety.

Speaking to someone about your burden or seeking additional help is essential and not a sign of failure.

Extended family members and friends may want to contribute in the care. Identify who they are and assign tasks to them. Make use of the time that they are around to take a break.

These breaks are essential to avoid caregiver burnout and stress.

Emotional Wellbeing of Caregivers

Being a caregiver is like going on a roller coaster ride. Just when the situation starts to pick up, something happens and you take a plunge. At times, it seems like a never-ending ride, gradually takes a toll even on the most well-equipped caregiver.

Manage Emotions

- Anger, sadness, frustration, loneliness - these are some of the common emotions that surface time to time
- It is important to remember that you are also a person with feelings. Acknowledge these feelings and find ways to manage them
- It can involve sharing your feelings with a close friend or family, writing a journal, or any activity that allows you to channel the emotions

Seek Information

- Uncertainty causes significant stress. Not knowing what lurks round the corner prevents you from enjoying quality time with your loved one
- Empower yourself with knowledge of what is happening, what will happen and what may happen by working closely with the medical team
- Equip yourself with the skills needed to manage your loved ones more effectively

Filter Opinions

- Friend and family may express their care for your loved one by contributing their opinions. Over time, the multitude of opinions overwhelm you.
- You know your loved one best. You will be able to make decisions in his or her best interest based on your knowledge of your loved one's preferences

Accept Help

- Accepting help is not a sign of weakness. It is acknowledging that you have your limitations
- It provides opportunity for friends and family to show their care and concern in a constructive manner. Let them know what help is needed

Widen Social Support

- Widen your social support network
- Speak to your social worker of your needs to find out the available resources in the community
- You may seek support from your religious community for spiritual and other support

Take Short Breaks

- Caregiving is a full-time responsibility which knows no day or night
- You are at your best in caring for others when you first care for yourself
- Adequate sleep and the occasional “me” time does wonders. Make time for exercise, meditation or other activities to pamper yourself. It makes you a better carer.

Staying Connected to Your Loved One

During the late stages, your role as a caregiver focuses on preserving quality of life and dignity.

Although a person in the late stage of terminal illnesses typically loses the ability to talk and express needs, some core of the person's self and their senses remain.

This means that you can continue to connect throughout the terminal stages.

Ways to Connect

Smell

Smell is very powerful. It is a sense that remains until the very end. Scents can create a bridge to fond memories or places, and greaten your loved one's comfort through relaxation.

Scents can be safely introduced through simple acts of gentle application of a scented lotion or by using a diffuser.

Touch

- Holding hands, stroking a person's face or arms, or brushing their hair can be soothing and help make a connection
- Namaste Care is a therapeutic approach designed for individuals with moderate to advanced dementia. Dover Park has adapted it for patients receiving palliative care.
 - It focuses on meeting their emotional and sensory needs through personalised activities, sensory stimulation and a calm environment.
 - Aims to honor the individual's personhood and nurture their spirit through meaningful interactions and loving touch.
 - Watch this video for a demonstration



Tap to open the video

Vision

A family photograph or a meaningful image can produce a response or lift their mood

Music

Playing or humming favourite tunes can bring back happy memories.

Patients, especially those with dementia who stopped speaking a long time ago can sing along to a familiar tune, remembering the words.

These moments could be captured in an audio or video recording as a memento, and revisited when needed.

Art

Connections can be made through the simple act of holding a brush or pencil and scribbling, painting or drawing on paper.

You could make a meaningful keepsake together. Examples include a curated album of photos or artworks, or something that can be held, like a clay print or plaster cast.

The journey continues.

As you hold your loved one's hand and accompany him or her on this roller coaster ride, memories are made and experiences shared. These memories can be a source of comfort in future.

You will also need to care for yourself and learn to recognise when the going is getting too tough. Reach out early for support, and as and when needed.

Ultimately, your role is about walking alongside someone through the final chapter of life, offering dignity and love.

Approaching the End

As the end nears, the focus shifts to comfort, peace, and honoring the spiritual or cultural needs of the person.

Being present, showing love, and ensuring a dignified passing become the most meaningful acts of care.