



## TERMINAL STAGE LIFE CARE-A BRIEF REVIEW

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**ABSTRACT** The care in terminal stage of life of a person having life threatening illness with reduced life span or debilitating disease is an important part of medicine and treatment. Such patients need Palliative care and help for comfort and support in all fields like medical, social, psychological, financial, familial and personal matters. This care can be given at hospital, home, nursing home or hospice centre by health care team. Plan and prepare the patient for terminal stage care by documenting the wishes of the patient for future treatment at final stage of life. Support should be given to the patient and family just before death and after death of the patient by social and spiritual means.

**KEYWORDS :** Terminal Stage, Palliative Care, Documentation, Spiritual Support.

**INTRODUCTION**

Terminal stage care refers to medical care to all patients in terminal days or final hours of life and all types of care to those patients having terminal illness incurable to the medical treatment. Goal---being to prevent or relieve the sufferings as much as possible while respecting dying persons wishes and helping him with comfort and care.

Terminal stage of life is very important time to the patient and family. Aggressive treatment prolongs this terminal stage of life. Medical course also does not have sufficient teachings regarding final days of life. So there is a need of discussion and attention on terminal stage care of life.

England, USA and some other countries have also given due consideration to the care and treatment at this terminal stage of life. Indian society of critical care medicine also made few guidelines for terminal stage care in Indian ICU. Purpose---being the avoiding of prolonged interventions and providing palliative care for terminally ill patients considering the wishes of the patients and family.

At terminal stage of life patient may have multiple issues regarding psychological, social and financial matters leading to increased sufferings and reduced quality of life of patient. So terminal stage care or palliative care is needed for giving comfort and better quality of life to the patient.

Following patients may need plannings for terminal stage care ...e.g... comatose patient with irreversible disease, chronic neurological incurable disease, metastatic cancer unresponsive to treatment, chronic debilitating disease with advanced age, after nonrestorative cardiac arrest.

Indian society of critical care medicine also suggested few guidelines for Indian ICU so that unnecessary interventions to be avoided and palliative care to be given at terminal stage of life for comfort of the patient....Choice of therapy should be decided with family/capable patient by health care team, Avoid unnecessary interventions if desired by the patient/family and discuss available modalities, Final decision should be documented, Withdrawal of life support should be done within the existing laws if desired by the patient / family, Effective palliative care and emotional support should be provided to the patient and family at every step by health care team.

At what place the terminal stage care can be given...It can be given at hospital, nursing home, hospice centre and home....Eligibility for hospice centre care is only if life expectancy is less than six months. At hospice centre main attention is on relieving pain and discomfort by providing palliative care. So that patient approaches the end of life with comfort, peace and dignity.

By whom terminal stage care can be given...Care givers include --- doctor, nurse, health aids, social worker, chaplain, rehabilitation therapist, dietitian, health volunteers, counsellors. etc. At home care givers are mainly family members and friends while doctor / nurse may visit the home.

Documentation also has its place in terminal stage care plannings ....

Advanced directive is a legal document which conveys the preferences and wishes of the patient /family for future treatment in terminal days of life. Views regarding CPR and DNR if required should be discussed with family / capable patient and documented. Any financial, professional, familial and social matter should be discussed in advance and documented.

Some common symptoms at terminal stage of life which should be dealt with palliative care are....pain, agitation, respiratory tract secretions, nausea, vomiting, dyspnoea, insomnia, skin and digestive problems, fatigue, fearfulness, depression, anxiety, headache, urinary and bowel problems, etc, .....so that patient remains in full comfort.

Patient may be of any age in terminal stage. there are some suggestions for child patient for terminal stage care....Ensure relief to all type of discomforts in remaining life, Frequent touches and hugs by parents are very comfort giving to the child, Parents should talk honestly to the child regarding his fears and disease progression, Difficult to talk about death so ask views of the child on birth and death, Encourage the child to express his emotions and reassure for parental love even after death, Child should be reminded happy moments of life and should be given a feeling of 'permission to die' from parents, All needs of the child should be fulfilled and allow him to play and enjoy with friends and relatives, Parents should keep the behaviour as it was earlier, Parents should be with child at the time of death, Parents should talk each other and friends and may take support of grief counsellors.

Death is near may be recognized by care givers by some symptoms and signs so that future planning can be done ahead and doctor may be informed if required.....Increased sleepiness and less responsive so try to talk the patient, Confusion for time place and person so remind about time place and people, Decreased socialization and withdrawal so assure the patient that you are with him, Loss of appetite -let him choose the food and time - try to keep lips and mouth moist, Loss of bladder / bowel control - keep patient clean and dry, Darkened and decreased amount of urine - may need catheterization, Skin becomes cool and hands and feet turn bluish - massage gently and use blanket for warming, Irregular and slow breathing with ratting and gurgling sounds - may need oxygen and suction of secretions, changing in heart rates, increased physical restlessness.

Some suggestions for family at the terminal stage of life ...Talk and give company to the patient and gentle touching should also be done, Involve the patient in discussions related to him and should be assured that his wishes for further treatment will be honoured, Let patient express his fears and should be listened calmly, Counsel the patient about his sadness and feelings for family by talking, Settle all the matters ahead for comforting the patient regarding the finances -business-legal-property and funeral aspects, Memorize the patient about happy moments of life and give spiritual support by religious person if needed.

Care givers may recognize that death has occurred by some features as ....Breathing and heart beat stopped, No eye movements and slightly open eyelids, Slightly open mouth and relaxed jaw, Bladder bowel contents may be released, Unresponsive to touch and speech, Confirm death by doctor.

Once death has occurred .....Don't make hurry in any activity , Family members may wish to sit by the side of the patient , Place body on back and pillow under head , Do not resuscitate if DNR was the wish , Contact funeral home , Call family- friends-relatives and clergy , Provide emotional support for family and friends to cope up their loss , Talk quietly and give helping hand .

Family should be cared and given rest also because they may be exhausted physically and mentally with anxiety -depression and sleep problems . console the family and listen their fears . Spiritual leader and grief counsellor may be needed . Funeral arrangements may need physical help ..Praying , religious music , sharing good memories and spiritual counselling is also helpful . Encourage the family and their confidence by bringing them to normal routine of the house and profession .

### CONCLUSION

So terminal stage care should be planned at terminal days of life for providing comfort and peace to the patient and family by palliative care keepin g in mind the wishes made by the patient / family for the treatment .

So everyone of us faces the terminal stage of life one day .plan for it and try to be bold to have and to give painless death full of peace , comfort and dignity..... THANK GOD

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