



Preparing for the Death of Your Loved One

A Guide for Family and Friends

We know that this is a difficult time for you as you think about your loved one who is dying. Please be assured that during this time in the hospital, we will give your loved one the greatest care and love. We hope that this guide will help answer some of the questions you may have.

What care will they receive during this time?

Our goals of care will be to provide care to your loved one so that their death will be peaceful and dignified. Special attention will be given to treat symptoms that cause distress such as shortness of breath, pain, and anxiety. In addition, we want to provide your loved one and you with spiritual care and emotional support during this difficult time.

What if I am not here when they die?

If there is any change in a person's condition that may indicate that death is coming soon, the nursing staff will contact you immediately. It is our hope that none of our patients will have to die alone; however, death is an individual journey that cannot always be predicted. In our experience, we have seen some people die after seeing family, giving or receiving forgiveness, and sometimes after family and friends have left the room.

What happens to their body upon death?

The nurse will prepare the body to be released to the funeral home. In some cases the hospital will need to notify the coroner of the patient's death before the body can be released. If the funeral home is delayed in getting to the hospital, the body will be taken to the hospital morgue until they arrive.

Is it my responsibility to call the funeral home?

After your loved one dies, staff on the unit will contact the funeral home of your choice. In addition, you will need to call the funeral home within 24 hours of your loved one's death to make arrangements for the body.

To learn about available grief
and/or spiritual support,
call (800) 673-5288.

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Will they need an autopsy?

An autopsy is not routinely done except at the request of the coroner or family. If you request an autopsy, it will be at your own expense unless you are enrolled in a special program.

What if they want their organs or tissues donated?

If your loved one expressed the wish to donate organs or tissue, the organ procurement agency staff will assist in the process and answer questions you may have.

How will I feel when they die?

Each person experiences loss and grief differently. You may feel overwhelmed by emotion or numb. Some people experience physical symptoms such as panic, fatigue, nausea, and depression.

Who can I talk to about my feelings?

In the hospital there are many persons to talk to including the palliative care team, pastoral care staff, social worker, physician, and nurse.

Is there a grief and loss program that can help me after my loved one's death?

Yes, you can tell the nurse or the pastoral care staff that you would like to be enrolled in an OSF bereavement program. This will be provided by the hospital's pastoral care department or OSF Home Care's bereavement services.

OSF will serve all persons facing chronic and/or terminal illness with the greatest dignity and respect by providing supportive care services in a coordinated, timely and compassionate manner in a community of caregivers committed to quality, safety, and the value of life based on our Catholic traditions and ethics.

-OSF Supportive Care Vision Statement, 2006