

Healthy Living

Signs it may be time for hospice care

Speaking about death is never easy, especially when the person facing a terminal illness is a loved one. Hospice care can help when a relative or close friend is in the throes of a serious health challenge. But individuals may not know when to begin considering hospice care.

According to the Hospice Foundation of America, end of life situations are different for everyone. There is no blueprint when a person is nearing the end of his or her life, which may be due to illness and affected by medications the person is taking. However, certain signs and symptoms are generally indicative that the end may be near. Hospice care is recommended when it is believed a patient has six months or less to live and that the illness is no longer curable, according to the health company Amedisys. Keep in mind that hospice care is not a death sentence; a person can be removed from hospice if he or she exhibits improvement.

The following signs may indicate that it could be time to speak with a medical provider about hospice.

- Curative treatments are to cease. In some instances, treatments for terminal illnesses no longer improve symptoms and quality of life, and some even make a person feel worse. The time might come when a patient feels they no longer desire aggressive intervention. A doctor may even conclude treatments are no longer warranted.

- Communication and activity levels wane. A loved one may sleep for long periods of time and resist moving around. He or she may be unwilling or unenthusiastic about talking or socializing.

- Doctor or hospital visits increase. Multiple hospital or doctor visits in the last several months can be an important sign of declining health. Symptoms also may be getting harder to manage, with the individual not being able to handle daily activities without some sort of assistance.

- Pain, confusion and restlessness are more apparent. Often adults at the end of life may become agitated, confused or even angry and combative at times. This could be due to a lack of awareness

regarding what's happening to them or because of pain, says Lake Superior Hospice. Some may even have false beliefs or hallucinations. Signs like these may indicate the end is drawing closer.

- Appetite and thirst declines. A person may no longer feel thirst or hunger, and may even

push away food. The loved one's physical system is slowing down and interest in eating and drinking can wane. Food and beverages should not be forced, especially if the person is having trouble swallowing.

- Bladder and bowel changes are happening. Some people lose the abil-

ity to control their bowels or bladder as their illness advances. Others may become constipated from lack of food or fluids. Hospice care can offer solutions to help manage comfort during these times.

- Skin changes are noticeable. Skin may become blotchy or change colors, and open wounds may

appear rapidly as the skin begins to stop functioning along with other organs.

It's a misconception that hospice is only necessary during the final days of a person's life. The truth is hospice can provide comfort, pain relief and support over the last several months of a person's life.

Movember

Movember® is an annual event that originated in 2003 as an attempt to raise awareness about men's health issues. Though the issue Movember® addresses is serious, the annual November effort also has a lighthearted side, as men are encouraged to grow moustaches as part of the approach to raising awareness about men's health. That component adds an element of fun and might even encourage more men to participate in an event that Movember® organizers claim has funded the development of 54 inventions, 70 therapies and 107 diagnostic tests for prostate cancer since 2006.

Movember® organizers have emphasized raising awareness about mental health and suicide prevention, prostate

cancer and testicular cancer. However, the month of November presents a great opportunity to raise awareness about additional issues affecting men's health, including pancreatic cancer.

The World Cancer Research Fund International reports that pancreatic cancer is the twelfth most common cancer in men across the globe. In addition, the Pancreatic Cancer Action Network notes that men are at slightly greater risk for pancreatic cancer than women. Recognition of pancreatic cancer symptoms can be an important step for men who want to embrace the spirit of Movember® and do all they can to live longer, healthier lives.

Recognizing and understanding the symptoms

The American Can-

cer Society notes that pancreatic cancers often do not cause any signs or symptoms in their early stages. By the time symptoms present, the cancer has likely metastasized, or spread beyond the pancreas to other parts of the body. However, it's still beneficial to learn to recognize the symptoms of pancreatic cancer, as such knowledge may compel individuals to report them to a doctor, who can then seek a cause and even develop a potentially life-saving treatment plan. Though the presence of one or more of the following symptoms do not necessarily mean an individual has pancreatic cancer, they should be reported to a physician immediately.

- Jaundice: Jaundice is a yellowing of the eyes and skin that the ACS notes is often one of the first symptoms of pancreatic cancer. Dark urine, light-colored or greasy stools and itchy skin are additional signs of jaundice.

- Back or belly pain: The pancreas is a gland in the abdominal region, and pain in the

back or belly could be indicative of pancreatic cancer. Back pain associated with pancreatic cancer could be the result of the cancer spreading to the nerves that surround the pancreas.

- Weight loss/poor appetite: The ACS reports that unexplained weight loss is very common in people with pancreatic cancer, who frequently have little or no appetite.

- Nausea: Pancreatic cancer can sometimes press on the far end of the stomach, making it hard for food to get through. The ACS indicates that this can contribute to nausea, vomiting and pain that worsens after eating.

Pancreatic cancer is one of many men's health issues that deserve attention by men who want to live healthier.

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