

What to consider when a family member is in palliative care during a pandemic



Background

When the person you are supporting is reaching the end of their life you want and need to be by their side. For many family carers, due to measures to ensure the ongoing safety of everyone, you may no longer be able to visit. We have put together some things to consider that may help you and your family member at this time.

Making plans

- Make sure an advance care plan is in place for the person with dementia and that the document is shared with staff and medical professionals. It is good to ensure that the care home has a copy and that you have a copy to refer to.
- If you are unable to be with your family member, it is important that staff have a clear understanding of their wishes. If your family member is transported to hospital, ensure this document accompanies them.

- Provide staff with specific readings or hymns either recorded or in paper form that are likely to bring comfort to your family member.

“Focus on the moment and what you can do for your family member today.”

Spiritual care

- Advise staff of any requests for spiritual care. Again, this must be documented clearly and in a way that best reflects the wishes of the person with dementia and your family. Make sure to share and discuss any spiritual rituals or practices that are important and need to be continued, especially those that support someone as part of end of life care.

Taking care of yourself

- If you are permitted to visit, use this time for connection. Focus on the moment and how you are feeling and what you can do for your family member today.
- It is important for you to reach out to a medical professional or counsellor if you feel you need support or simply need to talk. Grief and loss are not just associated with the passing of a loved one. You should be supported with what you are going through today when visiting restrictions unintentionally place a barrier to you spending precious time with your loved one.
- Acknowledge to yourself how difficult this time is, and that feelings of guilt and abandonment are common to many facing a similar situation.
- When leaving a visit, avoid long farewells or goodbyes. This can make you and your family member more upset and stressed.

DSA continues to support your care home, via our normal referral pathways. **We are considered an 'essential service' for residential care by the Commonwealth Department of Health** and, as such, our Dementia Consultants remain able to visit to provide direct support, or phone or video conference depending on your preference. Regardless of whether your home is in lockdown or not, we are still available to support.