

Guide to Good Nursing Practice

End-of-life Care

Preamble

Dying is an inevitable life event in the life continuum. End-of-life care is an essential element of care provided in the health care institutions or the community. Clients with advanced and progressive diseases live with possible disruption of their daily routine, experience undue pain of all natures, suffer from dread and loneliness through the caring episode. In addition to the physiological, psychological, social and spiritual care, the nurse should also take into consideration the cultural aspects, and optimize caring environment in the client's home and in the ward, so as to facilitate a dignified and peaceful closure of life for client. Bereavement care should be given to the families especially those who faced sudden loss of family member or loved one.

Definition

End-of-life care is the provision of care to the patient whose disease condition is not responsive to curative treatment, and his/her life expectancy is estimated to be within days or months.

Principles

In planning and implementing end-of-life care, the nurse needs to consider the following:

1. Affirms life and regards death and dying as an integral part of life continuum.
2. Client includes patient and/or family.
3. Provides measures for relief from pain and other distressing symptoms.
4. Attends to physical, psychological, social, spiritual and cultural aspects of care.
5. Offers support to help client maintain optimal quality of life.
6. Prepares the best possible supportive environment for client to end life with dignity and comfort.
7. Offers support to help the bereaved family to cope with the loss of a family member or loved one.

Responsibilities of the nurse

1. The nurse assesses and takes appropriate actions to alleviate the client's pain and discomfort.
2. The nurse respects the client's right to know and to obtain information about his/her illness and prognosis. The nurse adopts an empathetic attitude when discussing the illness condition and prognosis with the client.
3. The nurse acknowledges that making decision to forgo life-sustaining treatment is a process built on trust and requires time, information, honesty, and empathy. The nurse ensures that the client is involved in the evaluation of burdens, risks, efficacy and benefits of the life-sustaining treatment in question.
4. The nurse conveys the client's choices and wishes to the health care team. The client's right of self-determination and choices are respected and accommodated as far as possible.
5. The nurse maintains good relationship and effective communication with the client in order to understand their needs and choices in treatment and care options.

6. The nurse also has a role to be the client's advocate in communicating to and from the health care team.
7. Last office is a sacred and family affair. When performing last offices, the nurse respects the values held by the client taking into consideration the cultural and spiritual diversities in beliefs and customs.
8. The nurse appreciates that experiencing end stage of life is emotionally taxing for the client. The nurse assists the family to cope with the suffering, grief and loss. The nurse refers the family members for professional bereavement support if deemed necessary.
9. After the provision of care to the dying, the nurse conducts debriefing and provides support to colleagues and coworkers.
10. The nurse maintains his/her competency through continuous learning and updating.

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