

HEALTH & SAFETY: PALLIATIVE CARE

“Comfort Measures”

BQIS/Outreach Fact Sheets provide a general overview on topics important to supporting an individual’s health and safety and to improving their quality of life. This is the third of four Fact Sheets regarding Palliative Care.

Objectives

To provide information on palliative care comfort measures that can be done without physician orders, to support the person and alleviate pain and discomfort.

Definitions

Palliative care: The active, all-encompassing care of people to provide relief of and prevention of pain and discomfort.

Comfort Measure: Any intervention that relieves pain or discomfort; does not require a doctor’s order.

Facts

- Anxiety, anger, depression, frustration, fatigue, and sleeplessness lower the pain threshold and worsen pain.
- Pain is an intensely unpleasant experience that only the person experiencing it can know.
- Each individual has their own “vocabulary” of distress signs and behaviors indicating pain.
- Pain almost always causes anxiety or fear at first.

Recommended Actions and Prevention Strategies

1. Teach staff the signs/symptoms of pain (see Palliative Care “General Considerations” Fact Sheet).
2. Acknowledge the person’s pain
3. Provide routine care, such as keeping individual clean and dry, to promote comfort. If bedridden:
 - Change sheets daily or whenever soiled
 - Keep sheets smooth and free of wrinkles. Straighten sheets with each change of position; one wrinkle may feel like a thick rope to the individual’s skin.
 - Clothing should be soft light materials. Thin cotton or flannel is cool and less irritating to sensitive skin.

4. Make environment as comfortable and relaxing as possible.
 - Eliminate excess noise and chaos
 - Provide adequate but not excessive lighting
 - Calming music or relaxation tapes can help relieve tension and reduce pain
5. Provide warm soothing baths if the person desires.
 - Use bland soap, rinse well, and dry thoroughly
 - Include a massage of the back with lotion, using slow gentle strokes
 - Wash, comb, and style hair
6. Reposition the person who cannot do so for themselves at least every two hours while in bed and every 30 minutes while in chair as a comfort measure and also to prevent skin breakdown.
 - Use extra pillows and blankets for comfort and positioning
 - Use pillows to support painful body parts.
7. Prevent discomfort and pain by conserving energy and reducing fatigue.
 - Provide frequent rest periods.
 - Ensure a good night's sleep.
 - Have favorite things within reach.
 - Prioritize activities and arrange activities to reduce fatigue.
 - Carry out activities at times of the day when the person's energy levels are at their best.
8. Provide regular mouth care, especially after meals.
 - Use gauze or sponge swabs if unable to use toothbrush.
 - Providing adequate fluids.
 - Use lip balm and dry mouth products such as Artificial Saliva/Aquaphor or Biotene.
9. Offer frequent small meals of foods that they enjoy and that follows diet order.
10. Use mobility aids to ease daily living skills, such as getting in and out of bathtub. (May need PT/OT assistance to determine needed aids)

Learning Assessment

Questions that can be used to verify a person's competency in the material contained in this Fact Sheet:

1. True or False: Everybody feels pain in the same way.
2. True or False: Conserving energy and preventing fatigue is not important in preventing discomfort and pain.
3. Measures that could relieve pain include:
 - A. A quiet environment
 - B. Repositioning in bed every 6 hours
 - C. A cool shower
 - D. Bright lighting

References

Providence Extended Care Center Protocol for Pain Management

Fast Fact and Concept # 192: Palliative Care for Adults with Developmental Disabilities,
N. Ellison MD and D. Rosielle MD – www.eperc.mcw.edu/fastFact/ff_192.htm

Department of Pain Medicine and Palliative Care at Beth Israel Medical Center – www.stoppain.org

Related Resources

Palliative Care Series Fact Sheets: “General Considerations”, “Pain Management”, “Adaptive Equipment”

Pain Assessment Rating Scale

Pain Management Diary

Learning Assessment Answers

1. False
2. False
3. A

Outreach Services

outreach@fssa.in.gov • DDRSOutreach.IN.gov

As a service for persons supporting individuals with intellectual/developmental disabilities, BQIS/ Outreach developed the Outreach Fact Sheet Library. The information provided is designed to enhance the understanding of the topic and does not replace other professional or medical instructions or individually developed plans. For more fact sheets and information, please visit DDRSOutreach.IN.gov.



Indiana Family & Social Services Administration
Division of Disability & Rehabilitative Services
Bureau of Quality Improvement Services

OR-FS-HS-PN-29(12-30-09)