

End of life issues and the Role of the Faith Community Nurse

Imagine this scene: a person is in the hospital, actively dying with his wife at his side. The hospital nurses and staff come in and go out again and again as they tend to the physical, making the dying process as comfortable as possible. The FCN is present and simply stays there, quietly visiting with the family, hearing stories, offering comforting touch and prayer and perhaps sharing presence at the time of death.

There are many ways to support someone who is or may be near the end of life. Caring for the physical aspect is often more comfortable as nurses can share information, resources, tips on eating, sleeping, or physical comfort. Yet the care of the spirit is the central focus for Faith Community Nursing.

It's not always easy nor comfortable to care for the spirit. It takes time, patience, practice and prayer. It sometimes feels like we are not "doing" anything. It stretches us to grow in our faith, to let go of what we think we ought to say or do, and to learn to trust God to guide us. Like with any encounter, there is never a script, only a calling to be present ...and let God lead.

As you care for those who are nearing the end of life, you may find some of the following helpful:

- Pray before making a visit
- During the visit, listen for God's voice as you also listen to the person/ family
- Listen...listen...listen
- Use phrases like, "tell me more about that" or "say more"
- At appropriate times, ask open-ended questions, such as:
 - o What do you find yourself thinking about these days?
 - o What are you most concerned about?
 - o Where is your heart in all of this?
 - o Tell me how you have been gifted by life...what are you grateful for?
 - o How is God present with you...or are you not feeling God's presence so much?
 - o What are you looking forward to?
 - o What scripture passage, hymn, or thought seems to speak to you during this time?
 - o What would you like me to pray for?

It is good to remember:

This is their journey.

There is nothing to "fix".

Show up and the ministry of presence will happen.

Don't worry about what you are going to say... listen, and if there is something to say, it will come to you.

Sometimes you may want to support someone with brief weekly prayer visits. This could include other staff or members of the church and could be done in person or by phone or internet. Asking “What would you like me/ us to pray for?” will often reveal where the person is in their journey. Their requests may begin with asking for healing, then move to asking for better sleep or ability to eat, and then may transition to requests for prayers and care for their loved ones.

The FCN may be the one to hear worry, anger, fear, regret, confession or grief of losing life. They may also witness faith and hope, hear tender stories of life and watch strength appear in the midst of waning physical power. Simply showing up, sharing the gift of presence opens the door for God’s grace to appear. It is a powerful tool of the FCN and offering if is a holy privilege.

Resources

Everyday Strength: a cancer patient’s guide to spiritual survival by Randy Becton

Advance Care Planning tools, such as, The Conversation Project, GoWish Cards

Scripture

- *God alone is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. Ps 62:6*
- *Do not fear, for I am with you, do not be afraid, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my victorious right hand. Is. 41:10*
- *Even to your old age I am he, even when you turn gray, I will carry you. Is 46:4*
- *The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want; he makes me lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside still waters; he restores my soul. Ps 23:1-3*
- *Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you. 1 Peter 5:7*
- *Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. Phil. 4: 6-7*
- *It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed. Deut. 31:8*
- *What can separate us from the love of Christ? Rom 8:35 (+additional verses through 39)*

Submitted by Annette Toft Langdon, retired FCN