



End of Life Issues

What has COVID 19 changed

Objectives

- Attendees will be able to discuss COVID complications to end of life care and how to overcome them
- Gain knowledge of how to better interact with patients and families in facility based care when COVID is present.



28% of all Medicare Dollars are spent
in the last year of a patients life

Half of that money goes for
the last two months of life

Death and Dying Issues

- Recognizing the end of life
 - COVID 19 changes
- Ethical issues
 - New issues have arisen
- Hospice and Palliative care-when is it appropriate

Recognizing the End of Life

- Recognize when a patient is near the end of life
 - COVID has shortened the life span for patients who already qualify for hospice
 - Staff and family concerns with caring for COVID patient
- Help the patient and family deal with end of life decisions
- Realize that medicine can't cure all illnesses
- We can reduce suffering

Life Ending Situations

- Advanced age
- Complicated illnesses
 - Congestive heart failure
 - COPD
 - Alzheimer's
 - Neurological Disorders
 - Liver Failure
 - Cancer
 - HIV/AIDS

COVID complicates

Facing End of Life

- Help the patient and family recognize the end of life
- Consider choices such as living wills, power of attorney
- Consider Hospice if appropriate

Ethical Issues

- Ethical principles
- Decision-making capacity
- Advanced directives
- Withholding and withdrawing life sustaining treatments
- DNR orders/MOST
- Euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide

Ethical Principals

- **Beneficence:** physicians are obligated act always in the patient's best interest
- **Nonmaleficence:** physicians are obligated to do no harm
- **Autonomy:** patients have a right to make their own decisions
- **Justice:** physicians should treat patients with similar conditions equally

Withholding and Withdrawing Life-Sustaining Treatment Addressing in COVID

- No ethical distinction between withholding and withdrawing treatment
- Withdrawing treatment from competent patients is no problem
- Withdrawing from incompetent patients can be problematic

Decisions to Withhold or Withdraw Treatment

- Should be based on
 - The patients wishes
 - Medical indications
 - The benefits and burdens of treatment
 - Quality of life that may result from the treatment

Decisions to Withhold or Withdraw Treatment

- Withholding or withdrawing food may produce a sedative effect during the dying process
- Symptom management is goal

Hospice and Palliative Medicine

- When cure is not possible, treatment goals change
- From prolonging life to controlling symptoms
- Emphasis on advanced planning and ongoing care rather than crisis intervention

Palliative Treatments

- Enhance comfort
- Improve quality of life
- Relieve symptoms and suffering
- Includes medicines, therapies and sometimes radiation, surgery, etc. To improve quality of life

Barriers to Hospice & Palliative Care In Covid 19

- Late referrals: due to attitudes about death by physicians, patients and families
 - Patients with COVID sustain for sometimes a prolonged period and suddenly decline
- Prognosis-related issues: accurately predicting prognosis is often difficult

Grief and Bereavement-BIG

Changes in Covid

- Bereavement: “the situation of anyone who has lost a person to whom they are attached.” (LM Parkes)
 - Altered bereavement and isolation in light of covid
- Grief: The emotional and psychological reactions to bereavement
 - Our normal processes are disrupted
- Mourning: The social side of grief
 - Mourning rituals do not occur or occur differently

Grief Effects

- The Dying Patient
- Family
- Friends
- Care Givers
- Health Team Members

Ideas to help

- Frequent Zoom or FaceTime calls with the patient and family (let your facility partners help)
- Frequent visits when able
- Partner with a hospice provider to assist in communicating with patient families and give patient social interaction
- Music therapy
- Education to team members to allay fears or misconceptions about COVID.
- Pictures of staff in masks without their masks on.
- Provide bereavement/grief support to your team by utilizing community partners for a memorial service or grief group. Even if by zoom.

End of Life Issues

- Recognize life-ending disease processes and address them with patients and families
- Help patients make end-of-life decisions such as living wills, power of attorney and DNR as early as possible.
- Consider Hospice and Palliative care when cure is not an option