Journeying Through the Dying Process: Strategies for Providing Quality Care to Terminally Ill Elders

Topic Areas
- Communication
- Potential Issues
- Self-Care

Communication
- Be honest and straightforward
- Do not avoid or change subject
- Accept you cannot take away his pain
- Be open to his emotions & thoughts
- Be sure his grieving comes first

Art of Listening
- Do not need something to say
- Allow for silences
- Listen, listen, listen
- Listen in nonjudgmental manner
- Listen to nonverbal communication
- Do not offer solutions
- Do not try to “fix” his feelings

Attitude
- Be honest and straightforward
- Do not avoid or change subject
- Accept you cannot take away his pain
- Be open to his emotions & thoughts
- Be sure his grieving comes first

Actions
- Walk with your loved one
- Ask open-ended questions
- Affirm normalcy of his grief
- Encourage questions & concerns
- Provide reassurance
Honoring Feelings

- Do not use phrases:
  - “I know exactly how you feel”
  - “I can imagine how you are feeling”
- Instead:
  - “I cannot begin to imagine how you are feeling”

More Unhelpful Comments

- “I understand how you are feeling”
- “Things will look better tomorrow”
- “This will all get easier”

Potential Issues

- Conflictual or closed family relations
- Lack of enjoyment in life
- Unfinished business
- Feeling useless
- Fearing death
- Fearing future suffering
- Lack sense of control
- Life lacks meaning

Self-Care

- How have you learned to self-care?
- How do you (or will you) manage your distress or discomfort during difficult conversations?
Distancing Behaviors

- Numbing
- Avoiding contact with others
- Retreating to practical tasks
- Dehumanization

Be Aware of Your Emotions

- Allow yourself time to express your feelings
- Grief is natural and necessary
- Feelings are not an indication of weakness
- Give yourself permission to grieve

Dedication

This work is dedicated to the terminally ill elders who sacrificed precious hours of their remaining days to share their dying experiences and to teach me about dying.

After all...how can we, the living, teach others about dying? We cannot. The dying are our teachers and we are the pupils.

I am deeply grateful to have been their pupil.