Advance care planning

Advance care planning is a process of discussion between patients and their care providers that may or may not include family and friends. Its aim is to understand individuals’ preferences to support their end-of-life experience. Little is known about what constitutes advance care planning, who is best to initiate these discussions and whether it will enhance peoples’ ability to choose their end-of-life care (Horne et al, 2009).

Although bowel care forms just a small part of the overall advance care planning, constipation or faecal loading can pose significant practical problems for carers at home by, for example, creating extra laundry from soiled bed linen. Community health care workers need to be aware that faecal incontinence during the terminal phase, together with the emotional burden of watching a loved one approaching death, may overwhelm a carer who may already be exhausted. This is important given that some patients may engage in advance care planning without family or carers present.

**Conclusion**

Constipation is common in palliative care where it can cause patients significant discomfort and distress. Nurses are pivotal in providing end-of-life interventions such as bowel care because they are in regular contact with patients.

Nurses need to be mindful of the many approaches to managing the condition. It may only be through the development of clear palliative/end-of-life bowel care guidelines that members of the profession will develop the knowledge that is needed to be able to implement effective symptom management.

**References**


Ellershaw J (2003) Care of the dying patient: the last hours or days of life. British Medical Journal; 326: 30-34.


