

From the Parish Nurse

Hospice

Second in a three-part series on End of life issues

Maintaining an individual's hope is important but as a disease progresses the focus of the hope changes.

The first hope for a cure focuses on the use of all avenues within the medical community that exist to treat the disease. The treatment phase of a disease such as cancer, AIDS and others can be long and arduous lasting months or years. The patient and family spend countless hours in the hospital and/or in home care. It is an emotionally exhausting task for not only the patient but for the family members as well. Sometimes this is described by those experiencing it as an emotional roller coaster. The initial hope for a cure is riddled with obstacles that are distinctive within each member of the family. It is not unusual for family feelings and approaches to be distant and incongruent with what the patient feels or wants.

The second hope is for prolongation of life and this phase hinges on the unique wishes the individual has. Many times an individual will try to "hang on" for an upcoming holiday, until their

grandson graduates or they celebrate a golden anniversary. Often families grow closer during these times—treasuring the moments of life that in the past were left to fleet by unnoticed. The ill individual becomes more acutely aware of their surroundings and now notices the passing of seasons, eats favorite foods, focuses their attention on the color of a flower, talks to old friends and all during this time they try to tie up "loose ends" both relationally and financially.



At some point, hope for a cure and long life fades and the focus becomes on dying comfortably while sustaining one's beliefs. Hospice care

can be coordinated in the home setting or in a community hospice setting. Hospice care emphasizes the provision of comfort to the dying patient that will allow the person to maintain the highest quality of life possible. Both the patient and family receive emotional, spiritual and practical support while focusing on the patient's wishes and the families' needs.

Entry into hospice care allows the individual and family to enter into the hope of dying with dignity and meaning phase of life. The focus can be on spiritual beliefs, meaningful relationships, pain management, and dignity for the individual and their wishes. There is an entire team approach in a hospice setting that emphasizes palliative rather than curative care while maintaining sensitivity and responsiveness to the special requirements of the individual and the family. Hospice values the person's life and provides personalized preparation for death as a normal process of life itself. Family and friends are assisted by the hospice staff to be actively involved in support for each other and the dying individual.

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