

SOCIAL DISTRESS

What is Social Distress?

- Social distress is a disruption in one's social life (changes in roles, relationships, sense of belonging, sexual function and appearance) that causes a suffering of mind or body

What are the Signs and Symptoms of Social Distress?

- Talking about feelings of
 - Being lonely and/or feeling alone
 - Not being able to carry out personal roles as spouse/partner, parent, friend, etc.
 - Not being able to do your job
 - Shame or failure regarding not being able to have or lack of interest in sex. This could be due to illness and related issues
 - Being a burden to those providing care
 - Financial burdens
- Not wanting to receive company or visitors. This may include even close friends or relatives. It could be due to the effects of your illness on your own looks

What to Report to the Hospice/Palliative Care Team

- Any signs of behaviors listed above
- Any thoughts about suicide
- Prior history of social distress
- No interest in self and life in general
- *Unusual* anger or lashing out. Patient may not understand reason for anger or how to cope. The patient may take it out on others
- Any change in relationships that concern you

What can be done for Social Distress?

Social distress is common with terminal illnesses. Not everyone has it the same way or to the same degree

Patients and Family

- Do not feel that you are bothering the team by asking questions
- Asking questions means you care

Patient

- You may not feel up to talking with many people. It is very important to have at least one person with whom you trust. This is a person with whom you can share your thoughts and feelings
- Do not be hard on yourself for not feeling very “social”
- Allow yourself to be angry. Tell others about your anger
- Be sure to take your medications to control your pain and other symptoms
- It is okay to want quiet time
- Consider using this time to reflect, record memories and future messages for your family

Family

- Provide calm, relaxing setting
- Be willing to be present without having to “do” something
- Report any medication side effects or behavior that is out of character for the patient at this time
- Treat the patient with dignity and respect
- As much as you can, enjoy this time together and look for ways to make memories
- Try not to “help,” rather provide support
- Support any desire to stay in touch with friends
- Be willing to listen
- Encourage short periods of time for visitors during the day
- Try to not let the patient become secluded

You can find other HPNA Patient Teaching Sheets on end-of-life care at <http://www.hpna.org/PatientEducation.asp>.

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