



PALLIATIVE CARE AT MCLAREN GREATER LANSING

Palliative care focuses on relieving the symptoms and stress of a serious illness. The goal is to improve quality of life for patients and their families.

Palliative care is appropriate at any point in a chronic illness. It can be provided at the same time as other treatments you're receiving—even curative or aggressive therapies.

For more information on palliative care, call (517) 975-8957.



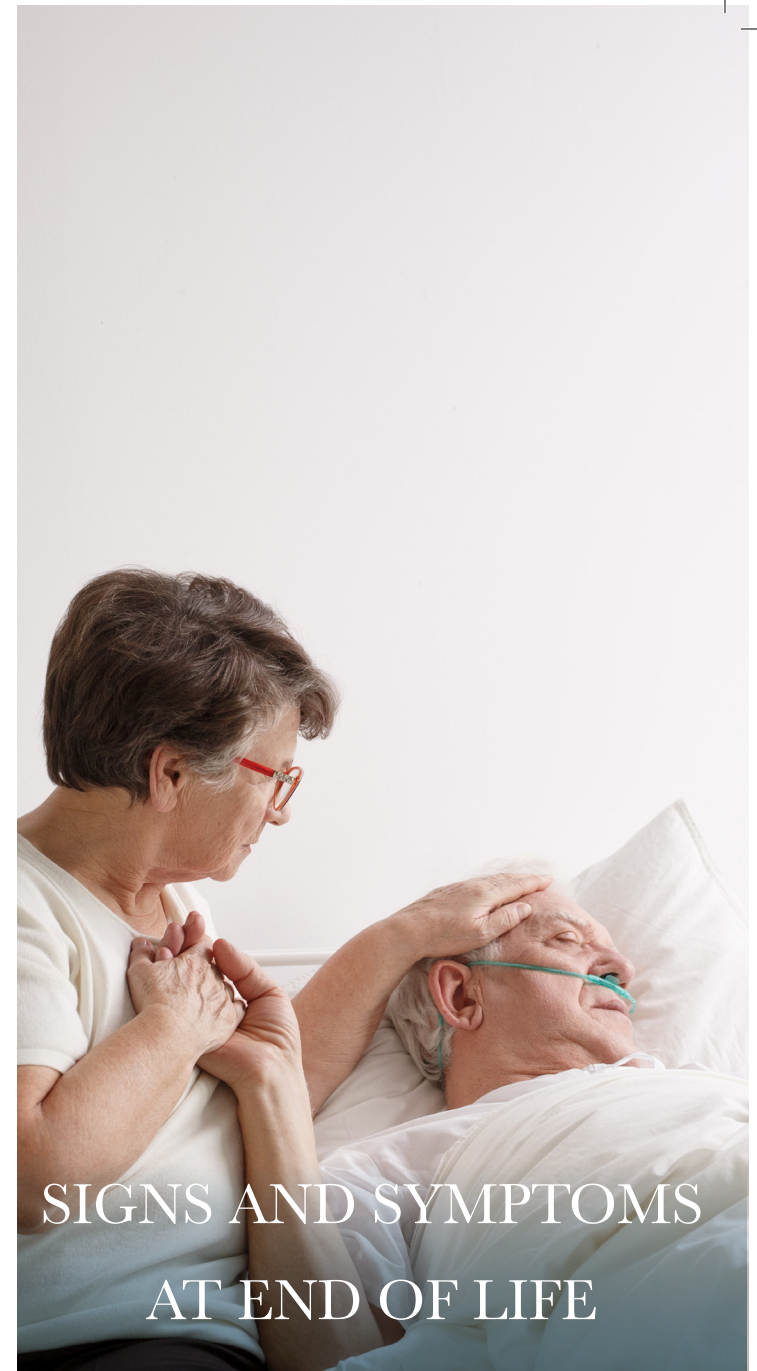
GREATER LANSING

DOING WHAT'S BEST.

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SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS
AT END OF LIFE



GREATER LANSING

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PREPARING TO SAY GOODBYE

Trying to prepare for the death of a loved one is difficult. Understanding the signs and symptoms to watch for that can occur at the end of a loved one's life can be helpful.

This guideline is flexible; some or all of the symptoms may be present, or none may be present. For some, it may take months. For others, only minutes.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE FINAL MONTHS

As the body begins to shut down you may notice your loved one experiencing some of the symptoms below.

- Frequent hospitalizations
- Chronic exhaustion
- Weakening and unable to perform simple tasks

Also, they may become less interested in food, as nothing tastes good. As the body shuts

down, energy needs decline. It is natural to want people to eat, but at this point, the body does not need or want nutrition. As hard as it is, be patient and understanding, as this is part of the natural death and dying process.

Loved ones may start to withdraw from the physical world. They may show less interest in their surroundings. You might also notice they are no longer interested in the things they used to enjoy, including friends and family. As they withdraw they may begin to reflect on life. This is sometimes done internally, with their eyes closed. They may sleep more or stay in bed all day. Your loved one may want you close but may not engage with you.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE FINAL DAYS

Your loved one may be sleeping often. It is best to allow them to sleep and talk with them when they are alert. They may become confused, talking to people who are not present.

They may talk about deceased relatives as if they are near. You may notice them talking about “going” or “having to go.” They may seem restless, picking in the air or at the linens. This is the normal process of letting go. You may also notice:

- Blood pressure may lower and heart rate increase.
- Body temperature fluctuating between hot and cold, which may cause your loved one to be flushed with fever or bluish with cold.
- Clamminess and perspiration may be visible.
- Nail beds, feet, and hands are often pale or blue.

Breathing changes can also begin to occur. There may be gaps between breaths or increased respirations. Breathing may become shallow or noisy. This is more distressing to caregivers than your loved one. Medication can keep your loved one comfortable.

You may notice a surge of energy near death. Your loved one may open their eyes, speak clearly, and seem alert. They may even request food or fluids or engage in conversation and want to sit up. This surge may not be noticeable, but it usually is recognized in hindsight.

WHAT TO EXPECT IN THE FINAL HOURS

As the dying process progresses, these symptoms may intensify. Often, your loved one's eyes are glassy and half open. They may be restless, and you may notice a purplish color to their hands and feet. You may hear an occasional grunting or moaning sound with breathing. Breathing may sound wet or have a rattle. Eventually, the breathing slows and becomes very shallow until they take their final breaths.