



# Depression and anxiety in palliative and terminal patients

A guide for volunteers





# Understanding the Emotional Landscape

- **Anxiety and depression are common in serious illnesses.**
- **Patients may feel vulnerable, confused, or scared.**
- **Emotions can arise from pain, fear, frustration, grief, and isolation.**



## Signs of Anxiety and Depression

- **Anxiety: restlessness, shortness of breath, racing thoughts, difficulty sleeping**
- **Depression: sadness, fatigue, hopelessness, isolation, changes in appetite**
- **Observe changes in behavior or body language (repetitive movements, stiffness, slouching, lethargy, lack of eye contact, lack of facial expression)**



# Importance of a Compassionate Presence

- **Simply being present has a huge impact**
- **Active listening and non-judgmental support are key**
- **Creating a warm and safe environment promotes a sense of calm.**



## Communication Tips

- Use open-ended questions ("How are you feeling today?")
- Avoid giving false hope ("Everything will be okay")
- Reflect emotions ("You seem overwhelmed")



# Supporting Patients with Anxiety

**Soft conversations, music, grounding techniques:**

- **The 5-4-3-2-1 method**
- **The 3-3-3 exercise**
- **Sensory focus (touch of clothing/skin)**
- **Breathing exercises e.g. 4-7-8 technique**



# Supporting Patients with Depression

- **Validate their feelings without minimizing their experience**
- **Offer company, attentive silence, and emotional support**
- **Encourage the patient to express his or her concerns**



# Recognizing When Professional Help Is Needed

- **Signs of severe distress, suicidal thoughts, or uncontrollable symptoms**
- **Stay in role: support, not treatment**



# Practical Strategies for Patients and Caregivers

- Deep, slow breathing
- Listen to relaxing music or nature sounds
- Establish small routines (reading, prayers, aromatherapy)
- Meaningful conversations with a loved one or volunteer
- Find short moments of distraction: look at photos, tell stories, play simple games



## Let us remember

**Depression and anxiety are part of the journey for many patients and caregivers.**

**Compassion, presence, and caring support make all the difference.**



# References

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