



Royal Free London
NHS Foundation Trust

What to expect when someone is dying

**Information for relatives
and friends**

This leaflet outlines what to expect when a relative or friend is dying. If you would like further information, or have any particular worries, please do not hesitate to speak to a member of the ward team.

How we will communicate with you

When your relative or friend is admitted to hospital, a staff member will ask you for your contact details, as keeping you updated is our priority.

You can contact us by calling the hospital switchboard and asking for the relevant ward, or staff will give you the direct number.

The Royal Free London switchboard number is: 020 3758 2000

Please ask us to make a note of any times of day when you do not wish to be contacted, for example in the middle of the night.

Medication, tests and investigations

As the focus of your relative or friend's care is now comfort, some medication could be stopped or new medicines may be prescribed to help control symptoms. These will be given only as needed.

If your relative or friend is unable to take medication by mouth, it may be given by injection instead. Sometimes this is given by a very small needle placed under the skin, which is connected to a syringe pump. This helps provide them with a steady flow of medication over 24 hours.

To prevent causing added distress to your relative or friend, unnecessary tests and observations such as blood pressure monitoring or blood tests may be stopped.

Reduced need for food and drink

A loss of interest in or a reduced need for food and drink is part of the normal dying process.

When a person stops eating and drinking it can be hard to accept even when we know they are dying.

If the patient cannot take fluids by mouth, fluids by drip may be considered, but this is not always appropriate. How this decision has been reached will be explained to your relative or friend and to you. Good mouth care is very important at this time.

Facilities

We try as hard as we can to ensure privacy, and wherever possible we will try to provide a side room for your relative or friend. However this depends on what rooms are available on each ward. We are sorry if we are not able to offer a side room.

Comfort and support

When someone is dying, it is quite normal for his/her condition to vary from day-to-day or even hour-to-hour. You may want to spend more time with your relative or friend and the ward teams will try to facilitate this where possible.

Please be aware that during the COVID-19 pandemic, there are currently visiting restrictions in place. The ward team will be able to update you on this, but you can access further information on our website here: www.royalfree.nhs.uk/visitors

Ward staff will make sure that your relative/friend is comfortable and you feel well supported. If visiting your relative/friend is not possible, it may be worth considering other ways in which you can be present, such as using music or communicating via phone

and video calls. The ward staff will be happy to support you with this.

Religious and spiritual needs

At a time like this many people have doubts and fears to do with the larger issues of life and death. Your relative or friend may follow a religious tradition or belief, or have other spiritual needs. If you or your relative/friend wishes to see a member of our multi-faith chaplaincy team or spiritual advisor, please ask one of the nurses or doctors and they will arrange this. Alternatively, you can contact the chaplaincy team directly using the contact details:

- Barnet Hospital: 020 8216 4355
- Chase Farm Hospital: 020 8375 1078
- Royal Free Hospital: 020 7830 2742
- Email for the service: rf.chaplaincy@nhs.net

More information about our chaplaincy-spiritual care team can be found here:

www.royalfree.nhs.uk/patients-visitors/advice-and-support/chaplaincy-multi-faith/

Going home or to the hospice

If your relative or friend wishes to go home or to a hospice for end of life care this may be possible to arrange. To do this, please speak to the ward team who will be able to help and make arrangements as needed.

We hope this information has helped to explain how we will do all we can to provide care and support during the last days of life.

If you have any questions or would like to speak to a member of the team (consultant, specialist nurse, ward manager or matron)

caring for your relative or friend, please ask a member of staff and they will be able to arrange this for you.

If you have any concerns that you would like to discuss in confidence, you are welcome to contact our PALS (patient advice and liaison service) for information and advice.

PALS at Barnet Hospital	020 8216 4924
PALS at Chase Farm Hospital	020 8375 1328
PALS at Royal Free Hospital	020 7472 6447

Further information about this service is available here:

www.royalfree.nhs.uk/pals

More information

For more information about the palliative care service at the Royal Free London, please visit our website:

www.royalfree.nhs.uk/services/services-a-z/palliative-care/

Your feedback

If you have any feedback on this leaflet or for a list of references for it, please email: rf.communications@nhs.net

Alternative formats

This leaflet is also available in large print. If you need this leaflet in another format – for example Braille, a language other than English or audio – please speak to a member of staff.

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Department: Palliative care

Version number: 1

Approval date: January 2021

Review date: January 2023

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