

Practical Caring: At the End of Life

Each year around 60,000 people will die an expected death in Australia. Most of these people will be cared for some, or all, of the time at home. Yet many people have never looked after someone who is seriously ill before.

Caring at the end of life

Family members often help and care for each other. Serious illness can change the usual family patterns. Caring for a person who is ill becomes a priority, particularly if they need more physical and emotional support over time.

A carer is someone who takes on the responsibility for looking after someone who is ill.

This caring role may take on many forms. It may be undertaken by people who would not necessarily think of themselves as a 'carer' - friend, neighbour, extended family, spouse, sibling, child, parent, etc...

This role may not be something that they thought they would ever be asked to do. Many people see it as part of their relationship with another person. Some people take it on willingly while others are unsure or feel a sense of obligation. Other people just can't do it at all.

Specific caring tasks

Caring can cover many things such as;

- > managing household tasks like cooking, shopping, washing and cleaning
- > helping with financial matters such as bill paying
- > providing transport for the patient and going with them to medical appointments
- > helping the patient manage their personal hygiene
- > managing medications in the home
- > communicating with family and friends

When caring for a person at home, special equipment and materials may be needed. This can make the patient feel more comfortable and be cared for more safely and easily at home. The family carer may need to learn how to use this equipment safely and properly.

Caring for the carer

Providing physical and emotional care for a person when they are seriously ill is demanding. Looking after someone, whether on a full-time or part-time basis is not easy. There are a lot of things to take into consideration, and a lot of things to learn. Many people who take on the family carer role find it satisfying and rewarding. Others may find it very challenging. It is easy to feel tired and overwhelmed.

There are respite services and other supports that can help family carers. Health professionals can provide information on these services. Groups such as Carers Australia also can provide help.

CareSearch is a website that has been developed to help patients and their families find quality information about palliative care. Pages can be downloaded or printed to read later. You can find these pages at www.caresearch.com.au in the Patients, Carers and Family section.

