

- Pain
- Mental status changes, such as inability to concentrate, confusion (caused from build-up of waste products)
- Fatigue, coma, and eventually death

Quality of life can improve by

- Addressing advance directives and goals of care
- Managing pain. Many patients may have some type of pain. The medication, dose, and frequency will depend if the patient is on dialysis. Morphine is not a good choice because it is metabolized in the kidney and has a byproduct that accumulates, contributing to uncomfortable symptoms. Fentanyl and methadone are safer choices
- Managing symptoms such as nausea, constipation, and shortness of breath
- Consulting a dietician about a proper renal diet
- Reducing fluid overload by limiting fluid and sodium intake and taking diuretics
- Providing psychological and spiritual support for the patient and family (especially if and when a patient considers stopping dialysis)
- Discussing the potential burdens and benefits of dialysis

Some patients may decide to try dialysis for a few weeks or months. This may allow them to make an informed choice regarding treatment. Dialysis may also give the patient time to complete end-of-life goals

It is important to note that Medicare will not pay for dialysis unless the hospice diagnosis is unrelated to the end stage kidney disease. If the hospice diagnosis is related to the end stage kidney disease, the hospice benefit would need to cover the dialysis.

What to report to the hospice/palliative care team

- Difficulty breathing
- Pain
- Any new symptoms. Not everyone has all of the signs and symptoms. Any new problem will be evaluated by the hospice and palliative care team and new ways to manage them will be discussed

Other HPNA Quick Information Sheets are available at www.hpna.org.

References

Kidney End of Life Coalition. Available at www.kidneyeol.org. Accessed April 28, 2009.

Moss A. (2002). *End Stage Renal Disease Workgroup, Recommendations to the Field*. Available at www.promotingexcellence.org/kidney from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. Accessed April 28, 2009.

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Ferrell BR, Coyle N. *Textbook of Palliative Nursing*. 2nd ed. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2006.

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