



## PATIENT / FAMILY TEACHING SHEETS

### SOCIAL DISTRESS

#### What is Social Distress?

- Social distress is a disruption in one's social life (changes in roles, relationships, sense of belonging, sexual function and appearance) that causes a suffering of mind or body

#### What are the Signs and Symptoms of Social Distress?

- Talking about feelings of
  - Being lonely and/or feeling alone
  - Not being able to carry out personal roles as spouse/partner, parent, friend, etc.
  - Not being able to do your job
  - Shame or failure regarding not being able to have sex or lacking an interest in sex. This could be due to illness and related issues
  - Being a burden to those providing care
  - Financial burdens
- Not wanting to receive company or visitors. This may include even close friends or relatives. It could be due to the effects of your illness on your own looks

#### What to Report to the Hospice/Palliative Care Team

- Any signs of behaviors listed above
- Any thoughts about suicide
- Prior history of social distress
- No interest in self and life in general
- *Unusual* anger or lashing out. Patient may not understand reason

- for anger or how to cope. The patient may take it out on others
- Any change in relationships that concern you

## What can be done for Social Distress?

***Social distress is common with terminal illnesses.*** Not everyone has it the same way or to the same degree

### Patients and Family

- Do not feel that you are bothering the team by asking questions
- Asking questions means you care

### Patient

- You may not feel up to talking with many people. It is very important to have at least one person with whom you trust. This is a person with whom you can share your thoughts and feelings
- Do not be hard on yourself for not feeling very “social”
- Allow yourself to be angry. Tell others about your anger
- Be sure to take your medications to control your pain and other symptoms
- It is okay to want quiet time
- Consider using this time to reflect, record memories and future messages for your family

### Family

- Provide calm, relaxing setting
- Be willing to be present without having to “do” something
- Report any medication side effects or behavior that is out of character for the patient at this time
- Treat the patient with dignity and respect
- As much as you can, enjoy this time together and look for ways to make memories
- Try not to “help,” rather provide support
- Support any desire to stay in touch with friends
- Be willing to listen
- Encourage short periods of time for visitors during the day
- Try to not let the patient become secluded

Other HPNA Patient / Family Teaching Sheets are available at [www.hpna.org](http://www.hpna.org).

**Reference**

***Core Curriculum for the Generalist Hospice and Palliative Nurse.* Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt Publishing Company; 2005.**

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