



HOW TO BE A GOOD HEALTH CARE AGENT

1. Just being there is the most important thing you can do. It is OK to feel helpless. We all want to make things better, we want to make some kind of sense out of the feelings of chaos, we want to have some control over the situation we find ourselves in, we want to have answers to the many questions that everyone is wondering about. Mostly, none of these things are completely possible. It is OK to not know what to do or what to say and to acknowledge that to your loved one. The most important role you play as a health care agent is to be a non-anxious presence—just be there.
2. Know your loved one's wishes ahead of time. Have a copy of your loved one's Health Care Directives, or 5-Wishes form available at all times. Ask questions, listen, clarify, try to understand what s/he would want and how s/he would like to be treated.
3. Be sure that care providers, doctors and nurses, know who you are and know how to reach you if they need you. Be sure they have access to a copy of your directives.
4. Make sure the care providers are familiar with your loved one's wishes and that they are being carried out. Do not be afraid to ask questions. Often you can be invaluable, just being a second set of ears to hear what the medical professionals are saying. Don't be afraid to ask to have information repeated or clarified if you sense that it is not being understood. "I am not sure we understood what you just said, would you repeat/rephrase it please?" "Can you go over that information again please?" "Can you tell us what that means in more familiar language?"
5. Most hospitals and nursing homes are very appreciative to know the wishes of their clients/patients and anxious to work with you as health care agent. However, if you run into problems, ask to speak to the social worker, patient representative or chaplain. If the doctor refuses to follow your loved one's wishes, contact the ethics committee of the hospital, nursing home or hospice.
6. Be courteous and be firm. Don't be rude, but be insistent. But mostly just be there. You have been chosen to be a privileged listener and companion on a very scary and sacred journey.

SOME THINGS YOU CAN DO IN YOUR MINISTRY OF PRESENCE

(Be sure you follow your loved one's preferences in these activities and you are comfortable in participating in them.)

1. Read from the newspaper, magazines or from poetry or literature that you know they enjoy. It is important that you have some knowledge about what they would like. Read from the Bible and pray with them, but only if you know that it is desired and if you are comfortable with that role.
2. Play music that they would like.
3. Play games that they are familiar with.
4. Take a walk in a familiar neighborhood or shopping mall.
5. Show photographs and tell stories about people that you both know.
6. Hold their hand, put a cool cloth on their forehead, or softly stroke their hair.
7. Talk about current events in the news, movies, family events, community or church activities.
8. Listen to them, even if what they are saying does not make sense. (you can respond, "Oh, is that right?" or "Wow, that's something.")

