



## **Nearing Death Awareness**

Nearing death awareness is a special communication of the dying. It usually occurs when patients are approaching or are in the dying process. Most patients who have signs of nearing death awareness are more peaceful after the experience.

### **Signs of Nearing Death Awareness**

People who are experiencing signs of nearing death awareness may:

- Appear confused and disoriented.
- State that they have spoken to those who have already died.
- Speak to people and see places not visible to you.
- Describe spiritual beings and bright lights.
- Talk aloud to people who have died before them, such as their mother, father, or close friend.
- Make “out of character” statements, gestures or requests.
- Describe another world of peace and beauty.
- Tell you exactly when they will die.
- Make hand gestures, reach for or hold unseen objects, or wave to unseen beings.

These behaviors do not mean that they are confused, hallucinating, or having a reaction to their medications. It is believed that the person is beginning to transition from this life. The person may be trying to describe the dying experience or something they need to do before they die.

These messages of the dying may be a symbolic communication to ask for permission to die or address a need. Some things they may need include resolving previous conflicts, receiving a visit from a friend, or knowing that you will be okay without them. What they say often has meaning to them and is linked between this life and death. For example, if they traveled a lot, they may say, "I need to pack my bags" or "I need to get on the plane". A patient who was a boater may talk about the tides. A rancher may describe his horse waiting to take him for a ride.

### **What You Can Do:**

- Do not contradict, explain away, belittle or argue with them. These experiences can be very comforting to the patient.
- Be present with the person. Simply sit at their bedside and be open to their attempts to communicate.
- Listen attentively and sensitively and acknowledge the experiences.
- Ask gentle questions about what your loved one is saying or doing. Questions such as "Who do you see?" "What are you seeing?" and "How does that make you feel?"
- Allow the person to share this experience with you.
- Discuss these communications with your Hospice team. The person who is closest to the patient may best understand what is being said.

When patients experience nearing death awareness and describe death as peaceful, they are providing others with a better understanding of the death experience. This may be their final gift to you.

Please feel free to call your Arbor Hospice team any time with questions or concerns you may have about nearing death awareness. We will help you draw from your own resources and those available to you through Arbor Hospice to ease this difficult time. You are not alone.

For more information on nearing death awareness, you may want to read the book *Final Gifts* by Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley. This book is available in most bookstores.