

Home Care: Palliative Care Resources and Planning during COVID-19

The Australian and New Zealand Society of Palliative Medicine (ANZSPM) provides information to support healthcare professionals in the community on peri and post-death COVID-19 care at home.¹

COVID-19 Symptoms and Timeframes

Symptoms will usually appear approximately 8-16 days² post infection. ANZSPM's resource on further symptom management³ outlines the common symptoms as:

- **Respiratory:** Breathlessness, cough and respiratory secretions
- **Neurological:** Anxiety and delirium
- **Gastrointestinal:** Diarrhoea, nausea and vomiting

In addition, older people may present with other symptoms⁴ such as fatigue, reduced alertness, decreased mobility, loss of appetite and absence of fever. Clinical deterioration indicating progression to severe disease can begin between 5 to 8 days² after symptoms are apparent.

Advance Care Planning

Knowledge of a person's care preferences is fundamental to quality palliative care provision. Proactively documenting the values, goals and treatment preferences of older Australians through Advance Care Planning⁵ is an integral part of COVID-19 care and management.

Clinical Management Guidelines

Planning of holistic and person-centred care and the prudent use of resources and equipment is particularly important during COVID-19; such as how⁶ and when⁷ to wear Personal Protective Equipment (PPE).

Social distancing measures and issues around the supply of PPE have necessitated the use of telehealth consultations⁸ and this is being supported by temporary Medicare items⁹ that can be used in the home care setting.

Clinical flowcharts¹⁰ are available to guide the management of COVID-19. In addition to care preferences, decisions about settings of care will need to be made according to the availability of medications, PPE and family/carer ability. ANZSPM provides guidance for further symptom management³ in palliative care.

Guides to communicating¹¹ and explaining difficult information and decisions should be available to all clinical and care staff.

Anticipatory Prescribing and Subcutaneous Medications

Upon COVID-19 diagnosis for the frail elderly and those with co-morbid health conditions organise anticipatory prescribing of end of life medications as outlined in [ANZSPM's essential palliative and end-of-life care in the COVID-19 pandemic](#).¹² Clients who request to remain at home in the event of deterioration may decline rapidly. These clients will require live-in carers who may be willing to administer medications.

Supplies and carer education resources to enable subcutaneous administration of end of life medications are available through the [caring@home emergency COVID-19 packs](#)¹³ that are funded by the Australian Government.

National Coronavirus Helpline: 1800 020 080

Call this line if you are seeking information on Coronavirus (COVID-19). The line operates 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

References:

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