

How to Support COVID-19 Patients at the End of Life



SPIRITUAL SUPPORT FOR A DYING PATIENT

The MGH recognizes that in these challenging times, upholding the inherent worth and dignity of patients with COVID-19 is more important than ever. For this reason, the Spiritual Care Department has created this resource to help bedside healthcare workers support the spiritual care needs of patients who are dying of complications related to COVID-19.

While we may not be at the bedside with you, a Spiritual Care Provider (SCP) can assist you. Page us at #27302.

Thank you for your care to our patients. Your presence, care, and commitment are the greatest gifts any of us can offer to patients and their loved ones.

How to find a patient's religious tradition in EPIC

1. Open patient's chart
2. Click their name in the top left hand corner
3. Click second tab titled "Clinical Information"
4. Look at what is listed next to the Religion category

Sometimes, the religion will be listed as "Unavailable." If you have time to have an SCP call a family member, place a spiritual care consult in EPIC and page us at #27302.

Ways You Can Offer Spiritual Support to a Dying Patient

SILENCE

At MGH there is a tradition of holding a moment of silence when a patient is unable to be resuscitated from a cardiac arrest. Holding a moment of silence for 30-90 seconds is a ritual that evokes reverence for the person who has died and their loved ones. It also allows care providers the opportunity to take a moment to process their own emotions, before jumping into a debriefing or the next task.

During the moment of silence, notice how you feel physically and emotionally. Notice your breath, the pace of your heartbeat, and if there is anywhere in your body where you feel pain or discomfort. Notice if any words come to mind that you would like to share with the patient, the patient's family, or your coworkers. Use the silence to acknowledge that there has been a death—and with every death there is profound loss and change.

WORDS OF COMPASSION

If a patient is dying and you do not know their religious and spiritual beliefs, you can offer them general words of compassion, like:

“I am with you. I am going to stay with you.”
“I am going to do everything I can to keep you comfortable.”
“I am grateful to be here with you now.”

If you have had the opportunity to speak with the patient's family, you may also be able to convey a message, for example:

“I spoke with your family. They love you so much.”
“I spoke with your family. They are all okay right now. They love you.”

GENERAL PRAYER

If the patient, family, or SCP indicated to you that the patient would like a prayer, you may offer one. Prayers are acts of love and come in many forms. While some traditions like Catholicism and Judaism have established prayers, most traditions also welcome spontaneous prayer. If you would like to offer a prayer and you feel more comfortable praying spontaneously, here are examples of what you may want to include for a patient that is dying:

- *Gratitude for the patient “Thank you, God for ____”*
- *A request for the patient to be comfortable, “May X be free from pain and fear”*
- *Gratitude for the patient's family and a request for them to be comforted, “Thank you for X's loving family. May they know how deeply X loves them and may they be comforted at this time.”*

- A request for forgiveness and reconciliation, “*May forgiveness be found wherever forgiveness is needed.*”
- Raise up the prayers that the patient is unable to speak “*God, may you hear all of the prayers that are on X’s heart at this time, that he/she is unable to speak aloud.*”

SPECIFIC PRAYER

If you know the patient’s religious affiliation, you may want to offer a prayer that is specific to their tradition. Here are some of the most common prayers for:

CATHOLICISM

The Lord’s Prayer: “*Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. Amen.*”

The Hail Mary: “*Hail Mary, full of grace, the Lord is with you. Blessed are thou among women and blessed is the fruit of your womb, Jesus. Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners now and at the hour of our death. Amen.*”

PROTESTANT CHRISTIANITY

“*Our Father, Who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on Earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us, and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory forever and ever. Amen.*”

JUDAISM

Sh’mah in Hebrew: *Sh’mah Yisra’eil Adonai Eloheinu Adonai echad.*

Sh’mah in English: *Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.*

ISLAM

Shahada in Arabic: *La ilaha illa Allah Muhammed asul Allah*

Shahada in English: *There is no God but Allah, and Muhammad is his messenger*