Deciding Whether to Hospitalize Your Loved One

The Right Care, in the Right Place, at the Right Time

Ask yourself these questions when death is near:

- Are treatments, tests and interventions, such as intravenous therapy, CPR or gastric feeding, the appropriate medical decision for a person who is at the end of their life?
- Will intervening to prolong life be of benefit to your loved one?
- Will treatment prolong the dying process and reduce quality of life for your loved one?
- What would your loved one want?

“Letting go doesn’t mean giving up but rather accepting there are things that cannot be.”

~ Anonymous

For questions, please speak to the Manager or Director of Care (DOC) at your home.

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Created on behalf of the Long Term Care Advisory Council

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Is your loved one living in long-term care and struggling with health issues? If so, you may be trying to decide whether your loved one should go to the hospital for treatment.

There are times when hospitalization is warranted and necessary. Generally, hospitalization should be reserved for residents who can no longer have their comfort needs and treatment goals met in the home but could have these needs met in the hospital. The physician and nursing staff at the home can make an assessment and help guide your decision.

Some things for consideration:

- What would your loved one choose if they were able to make the choice? How can you best honour their wishes?
- Do the benefits of going to the hospital outweigh the risks of not going?
- What can reasonably be expected from medical treatment, given the current condition of your loved one?
- Can appropriate care, including pain control, be provided in the home?
- Is it more beneficial for your loved one to be cared for by the care home staff, who can offer familiarity, security and emotional comfort, than hospital staff, with whom your loved one is unfamiliar?

You may be thinking that hospitalization is necessary for your loved one. In making your decision, it is important to ensure that the benefits of going to the hospital outweigh the associated risks that come with hospitalization:

- Wait times for assessment and treatment can be lengthy, and may add to the discomfort of your loved one.
- Diagnostic testing may be burdensome and painful, especially if your loved one has already decided not to seek treatment for any diseases the tests might reveal.
- Increased risk of contracting a hospital acquired infection.
- Increased risk of hospital-induced delirium.
- Increased anxiety, behavioural issues and confusion, especially if your loved one suffers from cognitive impairment.
- Possibility of reduced function on return to the home.

Tip: Before making your decision, review your loved one’s Serious Illness-Sudden Collapse Plan.

What will help you in making your decision whether to hospitalize your loved one?

- Determine what services/treatments/medications/equipment are available at the home to meet your loved one’s current needs (e.g., lab services, IV therapy, physiotherapy, occupational therapy, oxygen, palliative care outreach program, dietitian, speech language pathology, paramedics, physician/nurse practitioner availability).
- Determine what your loved one would have wanted by reviewing their Serious Illness-Sudden Collapse Plan. If one has not been created, speak with your home’s Director of Care to inquire about one.