

# GUIDELINES FOR SIMS DEATH & DYING SUPPORT VOLUNTEERS

## DO NOT DO:

- ◆ Do not administer medications by mouth or any other method
- ◆ Do not assist with hands-on medical care of any kind: changing dressings, bandages, feeding tube, catheter, IV medications, artificial hydration, modifying oxygen machines, etc.
- ◆ Do not provide food by feeding tube
- ◆ Do not support full body weight on your own
- ◆ Do not stay overnight
- ◆ Do not act in your professional role (nurse, social worker, lawyer, etc.)
- ◆ Do not expound on spiritual beliefs about death and dying
- ◆ Do not stay in a house where there is an oxygen machine and someone is smoking. If any situations at all arise where you feel threatened or unsafe, simply leave.
- ◆ Do not wear after-shave, perfume, or scented lotions

## DO:

- ◆ Be mindful of infection control:
  - ~ wash hands before entering and upon leaving, and whenever possible
  - ~ use paper towels to dry your hands rather than cloth towels
  - ~ wear latex gloves if touching blood or bodily fluids
  - ~ do not visit if you are sick
  - ~ bring your own: paper towels, latex gloves, hand sanitizer
  - ~ ask first before hugging or touching - people with terminal illness are often susceptible to infection or otherwise sensitive in ways we might not imagine
- ◆ Know DNR status and location of POLST form. If you are out with the patient, be sure they carry a copy of their DNR/POLST form and medical emergency contacts with them.
- ◆ Have cell phone contact for primary caregiver if they are not there with you.
- ◆ Maintain confidentiality of person's name, personal information, and medical condition.
- ◆ Be attuned and respectful of the home environment: shoes, animals, procedures, etc.
- ◆ Allow the dying person's end of life journey to unfold as it does, not as we want it to.

## OTHER:

- DNR:** If patient has “DO NOT RESUSCITATE” status on their POLST form, DO NOT call 911 to resuscitate if they stop breathing or heart stops beating. It’s OK to call 911 to assist with accident or fall.
- NO DNR:** If the patient wants to be resuscitated, call 911 in the event of any emergency.
- FALLS:** If the patient falls, use a chair to help them help themselves up. If they cannot, you can call the primary caregiver or call 911 for assistance. Make them as warm and comfortable as possible while you wait. Point out patient’s wishes (i.e. DNR) on POLST to emergency personnel.
- TRANSFERS and EQUIPMENT:** It’s OK to assist with transfers (from chair to bed, bed to commode, etc) and equipment (walkers, wheelchairs, transfer belts, etc.) only if you have instructions. Ask for help if you feel unsure. Do not support full body weight on your own. Always lock wheelchair wheels before moving someone in or out of wheelchair.
- FOOD/WATER:** Make sure it’s OK for the person to have food and water by mouth, i.e. that they can swallow adequately.
- BATHROOM & TOILETING:** It’s OK to help the person with toileting if they ask you to and you are comfortable doing it. Be mindful of their modesty as much as possible.
- BOUNDARIES:** Do only what you are willing and able to do. Don’t allow yourself to over-extend or be pulled into doing more than your schedule and capacity allow. Keep good boundaries in your relationship with the dying person. Know when to say yes and when to say no.
- SELF-CARE:** Ask for the support, collaboration, and information you need from fellow D&D volunteers or group facilitator.
- DEATH:** If the patient dies while you are alone with them, do not panic. Remember that dying is not an emergency. Call the primary caregiver to inform them. Sit quietly and stay present with your experience.

## REMEMBER:

- ◆ The primary role of SIMS volunteers is friendship, companionship, and meditation support.
- ◆ You are valuable just being there, don’t feel that you have to do something. Your presence is the most important thing.
- ◆ Stay present, open, and available. Go slow. Be aware of yourself.
- ◆ Listen with your whole heart.
- ◆ Keep yourself equal with your dying companion – no separation by sympathy, etc.
- ◆ Sometimes unexpected and uncomfortable things may occur. A calm presence and a faith in your ability to face the unknown with equanimity and strength helps during these times.