

Handout – PV 6

Caring for People at End of Life/Dementia & Alzheimer's

Catholic Health Associate, Teachings of The Catholic Church, Caring for People at the End of Life

- Human life is a gift from God, a sacred gift that no one may dispose of at will
- All persons, regardless of their medical condition, possess inherent dignity and are worthy of respect, protection, and care
- Respect for human dignity and human life requires that we take reasonable care of our lives
- Reasonable care does not mean that we must do everything possible to prolong physical life, especially when death is inevitable or when treatments would be too burdensome for the patients
- Patients should be kept as free of pain as possible that they may die comfortably and with dignity
- Nutrition and hydration can be refused when they cannot reasonably be expected to prolong life or when they would be excessively burdensome to the patient
- When medically assisted nutrition and hydration are not beneficial, our duty to care for the patient in other important ways remains, such as providing pain relief and caring for spiritual needs and healing
- When people are informed and able to make their own decisions about treatments, they should be respected and honored
- When people are not able to cognitively make decisions for themselves anymore one reason might be due to Dementia or Alzheimer's

This information is taken from the Catholic Health Association and rooted in the teachings of the Catholic Church that all human life is a gift from God, should be valued at any stage and condition and cannot be disposed of at will. At the end of life reasonable care should be taken to make people as pain free as possible but does not mean that life has to be prolonged when death is inevitable.

Nutrition and hydration as well as medically assisted nutrition and hydration can be refused when it is just a means to prolong a life and when it is no longer beneficial to the person. Rather focus and attention should be given to keeping people free of pain and caring for their spiritual needs. These considerations can be made for people when they no longer can make decisions for themselves such as those suffering from dementia or Alzheimer's.

Shining a light on Alzheimer's, the Alzheimer's Associate, Greater Dallas Chapter

- Cognitive symptoms of Dementia and Alzheimer's diseases can affect memory, awareness, language, judgement and the ability to plan, organize and carry out other thought processes
- Those with dementia are still part of the faith community and derive pleasure connecting to their faith even through home visits
- When making a home visit to a person with dementia, greet the person warmly using short sentences to introduce yourself and maintain eye contact when talking or listening to them and repeating yourself many times as necessary per their request
- Be aware that new behaviors you begin to see could be related to the progression of the disease
- Respond to behaviors in calm and supportive ways using a gentle voice and tone