

END OF LIFE HEALTHCARE & SERVICES IN CEDAR ROCK: ADDRESSING QUALITY OF LIFE ISSUES

With over 7 billion people currently living around the world, the enormity of discrepancies evident in the quality of life facing individuals and their families over their lifetimes is something that can't be ignored nor denied. There is no more poignant time, whenever and wherever circumstances present themselves, to providing dignity, compassion, caring, support and comfort to someone who is nearing the end of their life. This is an issue that needs to be addressed on many levels, as it affects both the young and the elderly.

Whether a person is living with a chronic condition that has become advanced, progressive and incurable; or is in the final hours, days or moments of either a short or long life, focusing on 'what do I do now' or 'what can/should be done now' are questions asked not only by individuals, their families, health care providers, but by policy makers, and society as a whole.

At Cedar Rock, our mandate is to focus on quality of life issues, and to address the sometimes uncomfortable topic of "End of Life." It is very important, as community, that we endeavor to honor what each person wants and/or needs to move onto the next phase of their life's journey with peace, love, dignity, and understanding.

Pre-planning for end of life issues is something many people tend to procrastinate at – they honestly believe they have plenty of time later on to focus on 'those things.' Sadly, more often than not, life presents each of us with tragic or unexpected scenarios, and many individuals and families are unprepared or become confused during a very emotional and physically demanding time. Some become despondent and angry to the point that remaining family members are torn apart needlessly and irreparably, because the 'wishes' of their loved one were not known by everyone close to the individual, and/or there was no consensus or agreement on what to act upon. To help reduce the stress associated with end of life issues, Cedar Rock will provide the necessary information and support services to residents of our assisted-living/long term care facility, ***Renaissance Place***, and their families. (See the Residents Handbook for more details.) Other residents of Cedar Rock are welcome to obtain similar information from the ***Health Services Centre***.

There are many legal, ethical and moral aspects to consider, over and above the medical and nursing care components to end of life processes. For some people, this presents a problem due to the fact that other 'experts' need to be brought in, and their services may be viewed as being too expensive or not feasible. This should not detract from the fact that an individual's 'wishes,' in the forms of a holographic (handwritten) will, personal directives, power of attorney, pre-planned funerals all assist to a great extent in ensuring most, if not all issues are looked after during a time that will be difficult for most. As each person is unique, so are their wishes, and respecting those wishes must comply with current legislation.

Some of the important healthcare/medical considerations individuals and their families are encouraged to discuss as early as possible include:

***Code Status:** do you want to have aggressive CPR, knowing that especially for the elderly, this may most likely result in broken ribs, punctured lungs, and additional compromised quality of life, should they survive the procedure.

A No Code/DNR (Do Not Resuscitate)/No CPR designation on a personal directive should be indicated; this information can be indicated on the personal records of residents and clients being seen in Cedar Rock. This direction can be changed at any time during a resident's tenancy in Cedar Rock, knowing that the most recently documented request will be the one followed by staff and medical personnel.

***Tube Feeds:** do you want to be kept alive by enteral feeds, should you not be able to swallow or retain solids or fluids, knowing that in cases of prolonged illnesses, tube feeds (inserted through the nose/stomach) can be a form of pain management, in addition to nutritional management, in that they reduce the possibility of death by starvation.

***Palliative Care:** do you want to have non-intrusive, non-aggressive medical, nursing, social and spiritual 'team' care that will keep you as comfortable as possible to alleviate symptoms and side effects that are the result of some treatments and medical conditions.

This specialized care also provides a support system to help address the needs of families coping with both sudden and prolonged pediatric and geriatric illnesses.

The caregivers, support and nursing staff in Cedar Rock's facilities have the expertise, compassion, empathy and dedication to help - qualities that make a difference in what, where, when and how end of life services are provided.

"There is no greater gift than being blessed with having a loved one in our lives, for however long that period of time may be. Let's honor them with our final acts of kindness and compassion in giving them permission to continue on their journey with the dignity and respect they deserve."

Edie Hogarth, Founder of Cedar Rock

In memory of Sophie Aronitz (Feb 1918 to May 2013)
Beloved grandmother, friend and inspiring mentor