**Ontario
Palliative Care
Network**

Palliative Care Resources to Support Frontline Providers during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Health care providers are now in the midst of delivering care in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Available data on cases of COVID-19 suggest that older patients and those with chronic medical conditions may be at higher risk for severe and fatal illness. As a result, as the virus continues to spread, the demand for palliative care will continue to grow.

Recognizing that palliative care specialists already have limited capacity to provide palliative care, frontline providers need to be prepared, supported and empowered to deliver the necessary care to address the needs of their patients. This document collates key resources to enable frontline providers to provide primary level palliative care.

As a patient's, their family and caregivers' needs increase, become more complex and/or change over time, it may be necessary to engage a palliative care specialist or other disease specialists for consultation, advice and mentorship. The Regional Palliative Care Network (RPCN) directors and clinical co-leads can be a valuable resource for guidance and access to clinical tools, as well as helping to connect with specialists at the local level. **Please reach out to Info@ontariopalliativecarenetwork.ca to obtain contact information for your local RPCN leadership team**.

NOTE: The content in this document is based on information available as of March 24, 2020.

Support for Difficult Discussions, and Crisis Communication

Ensuring the patient understands the nature and severity of their illness, and exploring their goals of care are crucial conversations to support decision-making and enable person-centred care. The general approach to these conversations is outlined in the following resources:

- Person-Centred Decision-Making: Resource for healthcare providers:
  https://www.ontariopalliativecarenetwork.ca/sites/opcn/files/OPCNGocPCDMProviderResource.pdf
- Approaches to Goals of Care Discussions: Resource for health care providers:
  https://www.ontariopalliativecarenetwork.ca/sites/opcn/files/ApproachesToGoalsOfCare.pdf
- Making Decisions About Your Care: Patient Resource:
  https://www.ontariopalliativecarenetwork.ca/sites/opcn/files/OPCNGocPatientResource.pdf
- Advance Care Planning Workbook: Ontario Version:
  https://www.speakupontario.ca/resource/acp-workbook-en/
- Advance Care Planning, Goals of Care, and Treatment Decisions & Informed Consent
  https://www.ontariopalliativecarenetwork.ca/sites/opcn/files/OPCNGocFAQ.pdf

In addition, practical advice on how talk about difficult topics related to COVID-19, including specific phrasing for patient and family conversations has been developed by VitalTalk, and is available here:
https://www.vitaltalk.org/guides/covid-19-communication-skills/

Finally, the Center for Loss and Life Transition has developed a resource that provides guidance around how to talk to children of adult patients who die of COVID-19:
https://www.centerforloss.com/2020/03/children-about-cornavirus/

Ontario Health

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Symptom management
Managing symptoms for patients with palliative care needs will be everyone's role. The usual guidelines for symptom management remain appropriate. Specific attention to dyspnea, delirium, nausea and vomiting, and pain will be particularly relevant for patients dying as a result of COVID-19.

Note: There is ongoing debate about the use of Nonsteroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (NSAIDs) and corticosteroids in the face of COVID-19 infection. Prescribing clinicians should keep abreast of the evolving clinical advice and balance that with the specific needs of the patient.

British Columbia Inter-professional Palliative Symptom Management Guidelines
Best practice symptom management guidelines that are available in both interactive and printable formats: https://bc-cpc.ca/cpc/publications/symptom-management-guidelines/

Cancer Care Ontario's Symptom Management Guideline and Advice
Provides tools for healthcare providers, for assessing and managing patients' cancer related symptoms and side effects, and information for patients about maintaining their well-being, and managing their symptoms and side effects. These can be accessed here:
https://www.cancercareontario.ca/en/symptom-management

End-of-life Care
There are no standardized provincial guidance documents on specific approaches to address end-of-life needs. Many institutions and regional programs have local and regional approaches with symptom management kits and/or order sets. The Regional Palliative Care Networks can be a valuable resource for this information along with hospices and hospitals. In addition, there are 2 new resources that were recently developed to provide some guidance for end-of-life care in the context of COVID-19:

1. A group of emergency physicians and palliative care physicians developed *End-of-life care in the Emergency Department for the patient imminently dying of a highly transmissible acute respiratory infection (such as COVID-19).* It is available on the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians website: https://caep.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EOL-in-COVID19-v5.pdf

2. A team of Palliative Care MDs, pharmacists & allied health in British Columbia compiled recommendations to develop a one page summary document *Symptom management for adult patients with COVID-19 receiving end-of-life supportive care outside of the ICU.* https://bc-cpc.ca/cpc/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/COVID-19-End-of-Life-Symptom-Management.pdf

Both of these resources are applicable to settings outside of the emergency department.
Note: There are reports that patients with COVID-19 can deteriorate quickly and have rapid progression of symptoms. Both sets of recommendations outline low starting doses of opioids. Clinicians need to be prepared to titrate doses quickly in the face of worsening symptoms. Consulting with local palliative care specialists may be helpful for guidance.

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Digital Platforms

- Guidance resource for integrating virtual care from Ontario Health Quality and Ontario Telemedicine Network
https://quorum.hqontario.ca/Portals/0/Users/170/54/10154/Draft%20Clinical%20Guidance_Adopting%20and%20integrating%20virtual%20visits%20into%20care_V1.pdf?ver=2020-03-13-091936-370

- Virtual care and the 2019 Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) – Ontario MD
https://www.ontariomd.ca/pages/virtual-care-tools-for-physician-practices-to-help-practices-contain-the-spread-of-2019-ncov.aspx

- Changes to the Schedule of Benefits for Physician Services (Schedule) in response to COVID-19 influenza pandemic (Billing Information)
http://www.health.gov.on.ca/en/pro/programs/ohip/bulletins/4000/bul4745.aspx

Additional Resources

- The Ontario Palliative Care Network has a Palliative Care Toolkit with best-practice tools to support palliative care delivery: https://www.ontariopalliativecarenetwork.ca/en/node/31896
- THINK Research has posted clinical tools and content to support providers in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic: https://www.thinkresearch.com/ca/covid-19-tools/
- On March 18, Dr. Diane E. Meier and Dr. R. Sean Morrison held a briefing on the impact of COVID-19 for the palliative care field. Watch the recording and download the presentation slides here: https://www.capc.org/events/recorded-webinars/palliative-care-and-impact-covid-19/
- The Center to Advance Palliative Care has created a toolkit that covers important areas for palliative care teams and for clinicians caring for patients with serious illness in the context of the United States health care system: https://www.capc.org/toolkits/covid-19-response-resources/
- The Supportive Care Coalition provides resources to support caregiver well-being. Their website also include a link to resources to address the impact of COVID-19 on palliative care practice: https://supportivecarecoalition.org/caregiver-wellbeing
- Oxford University Press has published *A Field Manual for Palliative Care in Humanitarian Crises*, and Chapter 2 is titled "Palliative Care Needs of People Affected by Natural Hazards, Political or Ethnic Conflict, Epidemics of Life-Threatening Infections, and Other Humanitarian Crises". This chapter is free to access online, and is available here: https://oxfordmedicine.com/view/10.1093/med/9780190066529.001.0001/med-9780190066529-chapter-2
- There are also various **educational offerings** available to build capacity among providers:
  - Learning Essential Approaches to Palliative and End-of-Life Care (LEAP)
  - Fundamentals of Hospice Palliative Care (FHPC)
  - Enhanced Fundamentals of Hospice Palliative Care Education (EFHPC)
  - Comprehensive Advanced Hospice Palliative Care Education (CAPCE)
  - Interprofessional Education in Palliative and End-of-Life Care (iEPEC-O)