

Brief Practice Guide for Emotional Support Prior to Death

In his last month of life, how much of the time did the staff who took care of him provide you and him with the kind of **emotional support** you both would have liked **prior to his death**?

Bereaved Families have valued:

Offer physical presence (hold patient's hand, overnight sitter) with Veteran at end of life.

Involve volunteers to sit with Veterans at the end of life.

Palliative Care Teams recommend:

- *Vigil team available 24/7.*
- *Staff remains present in the room to provide emotional support to families at the time of Veteran's death.*

Bereaved Families have valued:

Acknowledge the family's process of "coming to terms" with end of life and change in family roles.

Palliative Care Teams recommend:

- *When Veteran is ready for hospice and family is not ready, we intervene kindly on behalf of the Veteran to help families understand & accept Veteran's wishes.*
- *Veteran & family invited to attend Veteran Progress Meeting every quarter with entire Interdisciplinary Team for comforting & quick attention to their concerns.*
- *We don't judge--we serve them, treating them the way we would like to be treated.*
- *We approach each case as unique, with a goal to ask Veteran/families what they want.*
- *Psychology referral for family as needed.*

Bereaved Families have valued:

Offer animal therapy or allow pets to visit patients at the end of life.

Provide a bed/room for family to stay overnight with the Veteran near the end of life.

Offer lodging (e.g. Fisher House) or other accommodation for families that live a significant distance away.

Additional Palliative Care Team Recommendations from the BFS Compendium:

- *Comfort carts (CD player & CDs with Veterans' favorite music, coffee maker, snacks, educational material, flameless candle, notecards, stones with words like hope, comfort).*
- *We give Veterans & families a tour before hospice unit admission.*
- *Educating families is routine for our dedicated hospice unit staff.*
- *Our offices are close to unit, making our teams readily available.*
- *Palliative Care Resource Professionals training which includes ELNEC, end of life grief and bereavement communication.*

Link to BFS Compendium:

<https://dvagov.sharepoint.com/sites/VHACELCImplementationCenter/default.aspx>