

End of Life Care

Nationally, there has been much discussion in press reports about the use of guidelines for the care of individuals who may be at the end of their lives, and imminently dying. This framework is called the Liverpool Care Pathway (LCP)

For its part, the Queen Alexandra Hospital is firmly committed to providing the best possible care for all patients, including those who may be at the end of life.

As part of this, the LCP is available for doctors and nurses to use on wards for patients who may be dying, if the Consultant feels it is appropriate.

It is nationally acknowledged that employing this guideline promotes the best quality of care for a dying patient, who may be accommodated on an acute ward. A recently published national consensus statement confirms this.

(http://www.endoflifecareforadults.nhs.uk/assets/downloads/LCP_consensus_statement_24_09_12.pdf).

The guidelines promote discussion between the medical team and the patient's family (and patient as well if appropriate) about their concerns that the patient may be dying, and therefore might benefit from this framework of care.

Clearly, good, ongoing communication with patients, and their families, is essential at this critical, and emotionally intense time. The guidelines used in the QA Hospital firmly encourage this communication, especially around a time it is recognised that the person may die.

Secondly, with regard to the provision of nutrition and fluid the LCP is clear that it supports the use of all appropriate life-sustaining measures, including provision of these basic needs for all patients, as far as they are able to take them.

Most importantly, what it also does acknowledge, is that the use of potentially inappropriate treatments including artificial feeding and fluids should be reassessed regularly, especially if they may be harming the dying person, or against their personal wishes.

It is also relevant to note that the needs of patients on the LCP are regularly reviewed by the team caring for them, so that, should their condition unexpectedly change, and different treatments are required, they can be started without delay.

To support dying patients, their families, and the medical teams caring for them, the QA Hospital employs a Specialist team led by a Consultant.

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