



## MODULE 4

# Optimising function in palliative care

**Maintenance** of physical, psychological, and social functioning is important to ensure optimal quality of life for people with life-limiting illnesses and their families.

### OVERVIEW

**MODULE 4: Optimising function in palliative care** will help you develop your understanding of how to provide support for people with life-limiting illnesses and their families. In particular, it focuses on issues of loss, establishing goals of care, and understanding the effect of caregiving.

### AIMS & OBJECTIVES

After completing this module, you should be able to:

- recognise the different responses and emotions of people living with life-limiting illnesses and their families
- discuss strategies for facilitating collaborative decision-making on care goals with people with life-limiting illnesses and their families
- identify interventions that will optimise physical, psychological and social function for people with life-limiting illnesses and their families
- analyse the effect of caregiving on the family networks of people with life-limiting illnesses
- recognise how your own values and beliefs about death and dying affect your responses and interactions with people with life-limiting illnesses and their families.

## SECTION 1

## Living with a life-limiting illness - experiencing loss

### ACTIVITY 1: Responses to loss

#### THINKING POINTS

Think of a situation where you have experienced loss. It may be the loss of a relationship, object, or loss of ability to do something you used to be able to do.

1. Write a short paragraph about your loss. Consider the following questions:

a) How did the loss make you feel? Consider both the physical and emotional responses you may have experienced.

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b) How did you deal with your feelings?

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c) Has thinking about the loss here triggered uncomfortable emotions? If so, what has led you to respond in this way?

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Please see your facilitator after the session if you need to talk things through in more detail.

### ACTIVITY 2: Bob's story



#### THINKING POINTS

1. What are the losses that Bob talks about?

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2. What are Bob's reactions to these losses?

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3. Refer to the MND Australia publication, Motor neurone disease – aspects of care for the primary health care team. Discuss what other losses Bob might face as his illness progresses?

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4. Discuss Bob's response to other people's reactions to his situation?

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5. Bob states that he found it hard because 'everybody seems to be an expert on what you should be doing'. What strategies can health care professionals use to understand an individual's experience, preferences and goals and to establish effective partnerships with patients and their caregivers?

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**ACTIVITY 3: Establishing goals of care****THINKING POINTS**

1. How would you describe the primary goals of palliative care?

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2. How can you assess a person's preference for their care?

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3. What are some of the reasons that individuals with life-limiting illnesses may continue to have the goal of cure?

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4. How would you as a health care professional respond to the following situations:

a) The person's goals may not be consistent with their prognosis

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b) The care goals conflict with the goals and wishes of their family.

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5. In what ways might beliefs and culture influence personal goals and preferences for care?

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**ACTIVITY 4: Three months later**



**THINKING POINTS**

1. Discuss, in detail, how you would determine Bob's goals of care?

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2. Bob talks about the benefits of the wheelchair and the seat over the bath, but doesn't wish to go ahead with any major house modifications at this stage. Discuss the following:  
a) His reasons for delaying the bathroom modifications

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b) Health care professional responses to situations where a patient may have different opinions about recommendations for care.

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**ACTIVITY 5: Advance care planning**

**THINKING POINTS**

Visit the Respecting Patient Choices (RPC) website. Review the relevant legislation in conjunction with the RPC Guide to Advance Care Planning.

Answer the following questions:

1. What are the steps that an individual would follow in order to participate in advance care planning?

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2. What are the implications of the legislation for you as a health professional?

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3. What options would a person have if he/she wanted to:  
a) Specify his/her wishes in advance

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b) Appoint someone to act on his/her behalf.

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**ACTIVITY 6: Assessing & maintaining function****THINKING POINTS**

Visit one of the palliative care assessment tool websites listed in the resources for this module and identify an assessment tool that might be used to assess the functional status.

1. Comment on the dimensions of functional status that are assessed by the tool.

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2. Comment on whether the tool is useful for assessing functional status associated with different conditions, such as neurodegenerative disorders such as Motor Neurone Disease, or advanced cancer.

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3. What advantages and limitations would this assessment tool have in practice?

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**ACTIVITY 7: Exploration****THINKING POINTS**

Bob identifies the following problems:

- decreased mobility
- difficulty swallowing
- difficulty maintaining social contact.

1. How do you identify the personal and social resources that may help a person with a life-limiting illness cope with the loss of physical and social function?

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2. Consider your specific health care discipline. How do you promote physical and social function for the problems Bob has identified? Search relevant literature to identify the evidence to support your answers.

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3. What other health care disciplines might be involved in care planning to help Bob?

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4. How might your care plan complement the care plan proposed by the other health care disciplines?

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5. What strategies would you use to ensure an effective team approach to managing Bob's problems?

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**ACTIVITY 8: Caregiver needs**

**THINKING POINTS**

Reflect on Bob's story so far.

1. Identify Margaret's stressors a) Currently

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b) As Bob's condition deteriorates

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c) As Bob begins to near the end of life.

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2. How would you assess these stressors?

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3. What factors might affect Margaret's experiences as caregiver?

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**ACTIVITY 9: His illness progresses**



**THINKING POINTS**

1. What are Bob's main concerns?

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2. How might you respond to these concerns?

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3. Discuss some of the reasons that Bob may be concerned about using respite care.

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4. What concerns does Margaret express to their GP?

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5. What other concerns might caregivers have about caring for a family member at home?

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6. Consider your specific health care discipline. What options can you provide to support Bob and Margaret at home?

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**ACTIVITY 10: Bereavement**

**THINKING POINTS**

Reflect on Bob's complete story and answer the following questions.

1. Identify some factors that might impact on how Margaret copes with Bob's death.

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2. What resources are available within your community to help bereaved caregivers? These may be formal and informal.

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3. As a health care professional, it's important to understand that the death of patients in your care may have an effect on you. What self-care strategies will you adopt when a person you're caring for has died?

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