

Patient Resource Guide: Secretion Management

INTRODUCTION

Near the end of life, as consciousness decreases as part of the dying process, patients lose the ability to swallow or clear their throats. As air from breathing passes through these areas of fluid collection, a gurgling or rattling sound can result. While the sound may be distressing to the patient's family/caregiver, there is no evidence this is disturbing to the patient.

SECRETION MANAGEMENT

Causes of secretions near the end of life	
Build up of fluid and mucus in the throat	Increased shallow breathing
Decreased airway flow caused by inflammation	Decreased ability to cough or swallow
Overly hydrated	
Non-medication management of secretions	
Repositioning: elevate head of bed, upper body	Repositioning: Rotate head from side to side
Keep mouth clean and dry	Avoid pushing fluids, even if loved on looks thirsty
Medication management of secretions	
Medications only prevent build up of secretions, not remove them	Medications can be given by mouth, by injection or by patch (patches take up to 12 hours to work)
Side effects of all medications used for secretion management may include: agitation, anxiety, dry mouth, drowsiness, increased heart rate	Medications options include atropine, hyoscyamine, scopolamine, and glycopyrrolate. Please discuss best options with hospice agent
Things to remember	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Your loved one is not in distress, choking or uncomfortable 2. Management of secretions at the end of life is primarily done to comfort family, caregiver 3. When considering medication therapy, weigh risks vs. benefits, discuss with hospice agency 4. Secretions at the end of life often last only 24 to 48 hours 	