

Namaste care: Spirituality in end of life care for people with dementia *‘to honour the spirit within’*

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Namaste care is a loving approach that focusses on gentle sensory experiences that are very individual to the person. These ideas are intended to be considered alongside things that are in keeping with the person’s lifelong religious or spiritual beliefs and traditions and also alongside medical aspects of care such as pain management as this is also an important aspect of Namaste.

Being with a loved one at the end of life is a basic human drive but is much more complex during the current rules about social distancing and shielding due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether or not families are able to be with the person staff could encourage them to consider the following so that they feel included in a special way despite possibly not being physically present with the person. We know that where and how people die lives long in the memories of those left behind.

Touch

Touch is nurturing and a powerful human connection and communication and an important element of any Namaste intervention:

- Holding or stroking the person’s hand – gloved hand is better than no hand.
- Stroking their hair.
- Applying creams or lotions in the form of a simple hand massage to provide loving touch rather than just for providing ‘care’.
- Gently washing their face with a warm cloth.
- Ask the family to provide something for their loved one to cuddle- a cushion or family toy.
- Consider tucking the person in with sheets/blankets so that they feel secure (but not so tightly that they feel restrained)

Sounds / Music

Hearing is the last sense to be affected by the dying process:

- Having a recorded message or a letter from loved ones that can be read by staff saying goodbye and talking about happy memories.
- The four simple phrases suggested by Dr. Ira Byock, are “Please forgive me,” “I forgive you,” “Thank you,” and “I love you”.
- Nature sounds; did they love the countryside, seaside, birds, animals, being beside water?
- Music that they loved and meant something to them; this could be religious in nature or just a favourite piece.
- Reading aloud a favourite book, passage, poem as well as prayers.

Smell

Smell more than any sense is linked to memory and emotion:

- Smells that remind them of a special person or relationship; perfume / aftershave / soap that person used.
- Smell that reminds them of a favourite pastime or experience; baby powder, cut grass, flour, compost.
- Essential oil diluted in water- lemon balm is safest in a room spritz or on a tissue on the person’s pillow.

Taste

The person may not be eating in any normal sense but having favourite tastes applied on the sponges to their tongue may be possible during mouth care.

Visual

- Soft lighting that is not too bright or harsh.
- Flowers nearby (is this appropriate in the setting)

References / Resources

Simard, J. and Volicer, L., 2014. *The end-of-life Namaste Care program for people with dementia*. Health Professions Press, Incorporated.

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Byock, I., 2013. *The best care possible: A physician's quest to transform care through the end of life*. Penguin.

<https://namastecare.com/namaste-care-individual-program/>