



# Understanding Patient Mental Health at the End of Life Toolkit

## CHECKLIST

- Use the biopsychosocial model to consider the psychological, social, and environmental factors that contribute to a person's health. Think about how the patient's experiences at the end of life could be influenced by their culture, religion, age, and nature of their illness.
- How will you respond if a patient asks you about your beliefs around death, spirituality, or the afterlife? Have you thought about a professional response that you would feel comfortable sharing with the patient?
- Remember that fear, grief, guilt, denial, anger, and sadness are all common emotions for people who have a heightened sense of their own mortality. Conversations about how the patient managed in the past with life's ups and downs may be very useful in identifying resilient traits and support networks.
- Make sure you are familiar with common symptoms of anxiety, depression, demoralisation, and existential distress. Think about how you might respond to patients who are displaying these symptoms. If you feel that the patient's mental health care needs would be best met by referral, consider palliative care, social work, counselling, pastoral care, psychology, or psychiatry.
- Effective end-of-life care is supported by ongoing professional development and personal self-care strategies, including healthy boundaries, reflective practice, and continued learning. Consider how you can contribute to a workplace culture that supports self-care practices and fosters staff wellbeing.

## HELPFUL LINKS

- CareSearch. 2024. [Clinical Evidence Summaries: Depression](#)
- Kuperman K, Novoa K, Ferrao K. 2025. Palliative Care Network of Wisconsin. [Distinguishing Demoralization and Depression in Patients with Serious Illness](#)
- Marie Curie. 2022. [Providing spiritual care](#)
- Stoklosa et al. 2025. Palliative Care Network of Wisconsin. [Anxiety in Palliative Care – Causes and Diagnosis](#)

## VIDEOS, BLOGS, PODCASTS

- Chapman F. 2020. [CareSearch Palliative Perspectives – Mental health and older adults: the importance of being present](#)
- NSW Government Agency for Clinical Innovation. 2023. Palliative care video library. [The nature of suffering](#)
- Phelan C, Bruno M, Donohue E, Fleming S. 2025. [End-of-Life Essentials Blog – Caring at Christmas: When Joy and Sorrow Meet](#)

## FURTHER READING

- Butow P, Price MA, Shaw JM, Turner J, Clayton JM, Grimison P, Rankin N, Kirsten L. Clinical pathway for the screening, assessment and management of anxiety and depression in adult cancer patients: Australian guidelines. *Psychooncology*. 2015 Sep;24(9):987-1001. [doi: 10.1002/pon.3920](#)
- Rosenberg LB, Brenner KO, Shalev D, Jackson VA, Seaton M, Weisblatt S, Jacobsen JC. To Accompany, Always: Psychological Elements of Palliative Care for the Dying Patient. *J Palliat Med*. 2022 Apr;25(4):537-541. [doi: 10.1089/jpm.2021.0667](#)