Case study

Carol



Carol is a 67-year-old woman who used to be a very keen gardener.

Reason for palliative care

Carol has lived in an aged residential care facility for the past two years. She has advanced Alzheimer's disease and struggles to communicate verbally. She needs help with all the activities of daily living.

Pleasures

Carol is usually content to spend a good part of each day sitting in her armchair looking out at the garden. Her husband visits most days and often pushes her around the garden or the local streets in her wheelchair.

Symptoms

Over the past few days, her carers have noticed a change in her behaviour. She is reluctant to get into her wheelchair – she groans during the transfer, clenches her fists, and flexes her arms up to her chest. She has started to push caregivers away or grab their arms during care.

Case study

Harry



Harry is an 82-year-old man who used to love carpentry. He has a large family.

Reason for palliative care

Harry has been in a secure dementia unit for the past nine months and he is increasingly losing physical capacity due to his advancing dementia. He can only manage to walk a few steps and over the past six weeks he has noticeably lost weight.

Family concern

His son John visits several times a week to assist his dad with food and fluids at lunch time. He is concerned about the recent changes and asks you if Harry is getting enough to eat.

Case study

Wiremu



Wiremu is a 75-year-old man with end-stage heart failure and diabetes.

Reason for palliative care

He reluctantly moved into an aged residential care facility a month ago when Nina, his wife of 55 years, could no longer manage to look after him at home.

Family

They have three adult children, none of whom live locally. Wiremu is the proud koro of eight teenage grandchildren.

Care requirements and symptoms

He now requires assistance with showering and dressing and is very unsteady when mobilising. His appetite is poor, and he is breathless on minimal exertion. He is spending longer periods sleeping upright in his reclining chair. He has worsening bilateral leg oedema, and both legs have now started leaking.

Emotional wellbeing

Wiremu is a proud man and is reluctant to ask for assistance with his ADLs. When you speak with Nina alone, she is tearful and shares that Wiremu puts on a brave face when he is speaking with healthcare workers. He has been declining visits from friends from the bowls club and his church.

Nina is asking what she should expect as Wiremu gets worse. How could you respond?

How will she know when he is dying?

What should she be telling the whānau?

What pharmacological treatments would you consider to assist Wiremu in managing breathlessness and anxiety? Use the Palliative Care Handbook to support your answer.

Case study

Advik



Advik is a 39-year-old builder who recently started his own company, but is no longer able to work. He lives with his wife, Aesha, and their three young children.

Reason for palliative care

He has Motor Neurone Disease (MND), which has progressed significantly since diagnosis six months ago. He now has difficulty speaking and swallowing, has lost a lot of weight, is short of breath (including at night), has marked arm weakness and is also developing leg weakness. He struggles with increasing fatigue and suffered a fall at home last week. Advik's nausea and constipation have become increasingly troublesome as Advik has been spending more time in bed.

Goals

Advik is due to turn 40 in three months, his youngest child is starting school in six months and his sister is getting married in eight months. If possible, he would love to live long enough to be part of each of these important events. He feels that he would then be ready to die.

Concerns

Advik has concerns about dying at home due to the distress this might cause his children and Aesha. Aesha has recently given up her full-time teaching job to care for Advik at home. Advik shares with you that he worries Aesha is 'putting on a brave face' and is reluctant to accept help from family and friends.

What sort of decisions will Advik and Aesha need to consider as his disease progresses further? Identify the opposing/competing values.

How could Advik and his family be supported?

What pharmacological treatments would you consider to assist Advik with constipation and nausea? Use the Palliative Care Handbook to support your answer.

Case study

Judy



Judy is an 81-year-old woman living in an aged residential care facility.

Reason for palliative care

Judy moved into the facility about six months ago, when she could no longer manage at home on her own. She was diagnosed with breast cancer five years ago and recently her disease has progressed with metastases to her liver and bones (right hip).

Loss of interest in activities

When Judy first came to the facility, she participated in all of the activities, including exercise class and craft sessions. Lately she has been keeping more to herself and is spending more time in her room. She used to have a great sense of humour and loved sharing a joke with other residents and staff, but you have noticed that now she is much more withdrawn.

Family and community

Judy is a widow – her husband Jim died about 10 years ago. Her son lives in Australia and visits once or twice a year. She has a daughter who loves locally, but she and her husband are very busy running a business, so her visits are often brief. Judy used to attend mass on a Sunday with a volunteer from the local church, who would bring her to the service. She stopped attending services about a month ago. She has also stopped going on the weekly shopping trip organised by the ARC facility.

Pain

Judy has had an ongoing dull ache in the right hip area for some time. This morning when you bring in her breakfast she tells you that she has had a terrible night's sleep, and you notice her grimacing when she moves from lying down to sitting on the side of the bed. When you observe her mobilising, you see her grimacing as she stands up and steps onto her right leg. During her shower, you notice she is very tender when you wash her back.