

Video transcript: Palliative Phase of Illness

“Phase of Illness relates to the plan of care, not the illness”

What is palliative Phase of Illness?

Palliative Phase of Illness is a measure which describes the urgency of care needs for a person receiving palliative care.

It considers the care needs of both patient and family.

How do I use Phase of Illness in practice?

The urgency of the plan of care can be described as one of five phases:

- Stable
- Unstable
- Deteriorating
- Dying
- Deceased

The first four phases – stable, unstable, deteriorating and dying can occur in any order.

For instance, the phase may be unstable for several days, then become stable, then unstable again. Or the phase may be deteriorating, and then stable, and then dying. The phases do not occur in any sequence, or last any set length of time. Instead, if the urgency of the plan of care changes OR if the person moves care setting, then phase will change.

How do I apply phase?

We will start with the phase ‘dying’ as this is easiest to assess.

First, ask yourself if the patient is expected to die in the next few days? If so, the care plan will be addressing end of life needs, and the phase is ‘dying’. This phase overrides all others. If not the dying phase, then ask how urgent and unexpected are the issues being addressed by the palliative care plan.

If urgent symptoms or concerns, which need intervention quickly – usually that day – then the phase is ‘unstable’.

If there are more gradual and expected symptoms or concerns, which need intervention less quickly but which still need regular review and assessment – then the phase is ‘deteriorating’.

Note that this is NOT the same as a ‘deteriorating patient’ or ‘deteriorating illness’; it has quite a different meaning here. Think of the care plan, not the condition or illness.

If all symptoms and concerns are controlled or managed, and review is not needed (unless something changes), then the phase is ‘stable’.

When the person dies, the phase is ‘deceased’. This phase ends when all care after death is completed.

Remember: “Phase of Illness relates to the plan of care, not the illness”

Acknowledgements

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More information

Masso M, Allingham SF, Johnson CE, Pidgeon T, Yates P, Currow D, et al. Palliative Care Problem Severity Score: Reliability and acceptability in a national study. *Palliative Medicine*. 2016;30; (5):479-85.

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0269216314551814>

Mather H, Guo P, Firth A, Davies JM, Sykes N, Landon A, et al. Phase of Illness in palliative care: Cross-sectional analysis of clinical data from community, hospital and hospice patients. *Palliat Med*. 2018 Feb; 32(2): 404-412. Open access link <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0269216317727157>