

Death as a Rite of Passage

Therapeutic Essential Oils for the Dying and Their Caretakers

Using essential oils in a palliative care environment can be soothing, relaxing and make the difficult task of caring for a dying person easier. Caring for a dying loved one at home or in a hospice facility is one of the most traumatic and stressful situations, particularly if the patient is your child, no matter what age. The care itself is physically demanding: lifting, turning, and running around all take their toll on the caregivers' bodies. The emotional stress involved with caring for a dying loved one and working with a team of professionals and other caregivers is also exhausting and difficult.

Essential Oils Help Caregiver and Patient

The main goals in using essential oils in a palliative care setting are to reduce stress, increase physical contact and increase feelings of well-being and quality of life. Both the caregiver and the patient can benefit from the stress-relieving benefits of lavender essential oil diffused in the patient's room. A soothing aromatherapy hand or foot massage can relieve anxiety in a caring, gentle way and bring about deeper, more relaxed sleep.

Aromatherapy and Palliative Care Studies

Studies have been undertaken to ascertain the benefits of the use of essential oils in palliative care situations. One such study that looked at the benefits to cancer patients who received aromatherapy massage in a palliative care setting found that "there was a statistically significant reduction in anxiety after each massage and the patients who received aromatherapy massage also noted improvements in their disposition, physical comfort and their quality of life." (Wilkinson, Aldridge, Salmon, Cain, and Wilson, "An Evaluation of Aromatherapy massage in Palliative Care," *Palliat Med*, 1999, Sept: 13(5):409-17.) Another study "measured the responses of 17 cancer hospice patients to humidified essential lavender oil." Positive changes in blood pressure and pulse, pain, anxiety, depression, and sense of well-being were noted. (Louis and Kowalski, *American Journal of Hospice and Palliative Medicine*, 2002.)

Essential Oils in a Hospice Facility

If the patient is in a hospice facility the facility administrator may want to know whether a qualified aroma therapist has been consulted, what quality essential oils are being used, which essential oils will be used, and how the oils will be used – dispersion, massage, or any other method.

Diffusing Essential Oils

One of the best ways to use essential oils is in a diffuser, preferably a cold air one, and one that operates relatively quietly. Everyone will enjoy the benefits – the patient, staff, support workers and visitors alike. Choose an essential oil or essential oil blend based on the patient's needs and start with only one or two drops, adding more slowly to see how the strength affects the patient.

Palliative Care Aroma Therapy Massage

If massage is being used it must be very gentle and one must always avoid areas around tumor sites. Some people do not want to be touched but may enjoy contact with a gentle hand massage, or possibly

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a foot massage. A pleasing aroma, the patient's choice of music and family and friends close by can help to reduce fear and make the process of the final journey a little more acceptable to all.

Essential Oils You Should Not Use

The following list contains the essential oils that should not be used in a palliative care setting:

- Cancer - anise, basil, fennel and nutmeg;
- Estrogen-dependent cancers - anise (aniseed), fennel, lemongrass, Melissa, citronella, bergamot, and eucalyptus;
- Cardiac disease - peppermint;
- Hepatic disease - anise (aniseed), basil, bay, cinnamon and clove; and
- Renal disease - bay, cinnamon and clove.

Be sure to use ONLY Therapeutic Grade Oils for healing purposes. The process Young Living uses when planting, cultivating, harvesting, and distilling a batch of oil is crucial to retaining its vital compounds. Without the exact blend of naturally-occurring plant chemicals, an essential oil can lose its beneficial properties and fail to produce the desired effect. The following are recommended essentials oils and blends:

Acceptance™ stimulates the mind with essential oils specially blended to promote feelings of accepting ourselves and other, regardless of perceived barriers. This blend also helps one feel secure and overcome denial.

Sacred Mountain™ creates a feeling of protection, empowerment and grounding.

Valor® empowers the physical and spiritual body. It helps overcome fear and increases feelings of strength, courage, self-esteem, calmness, peace and relaxation.

Hyssop helps dry mucus and ease the breathing of a dying person.

Cypress is used to promote emotional well-being in times of loss or stress. It also stimulates the production of white blood cells and boosts natural defenses. It is generally massaged along the spine, on armpits, feet, and on the chest over the heart.

Frankincense & Myrrh are traditional sacred oils of blessing used to clear the emotional atmosphere and instill peacefulness.

Forgiveness is a versatile essential oil blend that helps heal issues that may need forgiveness.

Peace and Calming helps reduce depression, anxiety, stress, and tension.

Joy brings back memories of being loved, being held, and sharing loving times. It releases grief by opening up the adrenal glands.

Release is an obvious essential oil blend choice for both the dying and survivors.

Trauma Life soothes grief and fear of death and dying, release buried emotional trauma.

For more information, please contact Disa Van Orman, certified Clinical Aromatherapist, Raindrop Practitioner, Healing Touch for Animals Practitioner, and Spiritual Healer.
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