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**Anova**  
HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

Home Health · Hospice · Palliative · Home Care

## HOSPICE PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### CHANGES IN BREATHING AND CONGESTION

You may observe that breathing is shallow and quickened, or slow and labored. The person may make gurgling sounds, sometimes referred to as the "death rattle." These sounds are due to pooling of secretions and an inability to cough them up. The air passing through the mucus causes this sound.

The breathing pattern most disturbing to witnesses, called cheyne-stokes breathing,, is marked by periods of no breathing at all (up to 45 seconds) followed by deeper and more frequent respirations. These respirations are common and result from decreased oxygen supply to the vital organs and a build-up of waste products in the body.

This condition is not uncomfortable or painful for the dying person, although it may be unsettling to observe. The "death rattle," or cheyne-stokes breathing, indicate that death is near.

#### What you can do:

- DO NOT PANIC. This can increase any fear that may already be present for the dying person
- Alert the hospice team if breathing is especially labored or if you notice the "death rattle" or cheyne-stokes breathing
- Raise the head of the bed to help breathing
- If secretions are pooling in the mouth, turn the head and position the body so that gravity can drain them. Suctioning rarely helps and is not recommended.
- If appropriate, wipe out the mouth with a soft, moist cloth to cleanse excess secretions.
- Speak gently and lovingly, and use gentle, reassuring touch to ease fear
- Be open to using any medications recommended/prescribed by the hospice team

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