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## HOSPICE PATIENT AND FAMILY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

### HUMAN IMMUNODEFICIENCY VIRUS (HIV)

#### What is HIV?

Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) is a virus that attacks the immune system, specifically the CD4 cells (T cells), which play a crucial role in the body's defense against infections. Over time, untreated HIV can lead to Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome (AIDS), a condition where the immune system is severely damaged and becomes unable to fend off opportunistic infections and certain cancers.

#### What are the Signs and Symptoms of HIV?

HIV symptoms can vary, and some individuals may not experience noticeable symptoms in the early stages. Common signs and symptoms include:

- Fever and chills
- Recurrent infections
- Unexplained weight loss
- Fatigue and weakness
- Night sweats
- Swollen lymph nodes
- Recurrent oral or genital sores
- Diarrhea
- Cough and shortness of breath

#### What potential factors can cause HIV?

HIV is primarily transmitted through contact with certain body fluids, including blood, semen, vaginal fluids, rectal fluids, and breast milk. Common modes of transmission include:

- Unprotected sexual contact with an infected person
- Sharing of needles or syringes with someone who has HIV
- Receiving contaminated blood or blood products
- From an infected mother to her child during childbirth or breastfeeding

#### What can be done for the person with HIV?

Although there is no cure for HIV, effective treatment with antiretroviral therapy (ART) can control the virus, allowing individuals with HIV to live healthy lives. Here are some general strategies:

- Early detection through regular HIV testing and prompt initiation of antiretroviral therapy.
- Adherence to prescribed antiretroviral medications to suppress the virus and maintain a healthy immune system.
- Regular medical check-ups to monitor viral load, CD4 cell count, and overall health.
- Prevention of opportunistic infections through vaccinations and prophylactic medications.

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- Adoption of safer sex practices to prevent transmission to sexual partners.
- Engagement in support groups and counseling to address the emotional and social aspects of living with HIV.
- Implementation of harm reduction strategies for individuals at risk of substance abuse.
- Maintenance of a healthy lifestyle through proper nutrition, regular exercise, and adequate rest.
- Prevention of mother-to-child transmission through antiretroviral medications during pregnancy and breastfeeding.

**Open communication with healthcare providers, a commitment to medication adherence, and seeking support from HIV-specific organizations contribute to successful HIV management. Additionally, ongoing education about HIV prevention and treatment options is crucial for individuals living with or at risk of HIV.**

