

Dear Queensland Medical Colleague,

**RE: PROVISION OF TERMINAL PHASE PALLIATIVE CARE FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED BY COVID-19 AND LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY**

This communication concerns the provision of **terminal phase** palliative care for people affected by COVID-19 and living in the community: either in private homes, other supported accommodation or a residential aged care facility (RACF). It needs to be remembered, nonetheless, that most people survive COVID-19, depending on physiological reserve.

If the COVID-19 situation in Europe is indicative, Queensland hospitals will quickly become limited in their capacity to admit patients. People will need to be cared for at home, indeed many will prefer that environment of care and will refuse hospitalisation. Some people affected by COVID-19 will require palliative care, particularly in their last week of life. Your care for these people, as well as those with non-COVID-19 illnesses, is essential.

The following Checklist provides a guide to the proactive management of likely emergent needs of terminally ill COVID-19 patients so that a person-centred “good death” is possible and important decisions are not made in emotionally charged situations. The Checklist is limited to the third clinical process outlined in [End-of-Life Care Framework – Last Twelve Months of Life Silver Book – Part A, RACGP](#). The Checklist should not be used in isolation; for up to date information concerning the rapidly evolving Covid-19 situation and public health requirements, please refer to [RACGP COVID-19 Information, CDNA National guidelines for public health units](#). Content of the Checklist remains subordinate to your clinical judgement.

Should the care of your patient become complex, you could consider finding your closest **specialist palliative care service** and refer to them. If no such service is easily available, a palliative care medical specialist can be contacted 24/7 for advice by calling **PallConsult on 1300 PALLDR (1300 725 537)**.

Please find attached a checklist and other useful resources to assist in your care of people affected by COVID-19 and living in the community.

Yours sincerely



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# CHECKLIST

## FOR THE PROVISION OF TERMINAL PHASE PALLIATIVE CARE FOR PEOPLE AFFECTED BY COVID-19 AND LIVING IN THE COMMUNITY

- If the person is in a RACF use this Checklist in conjunction with the following document: [Checklist for Residential Aged Care Facility \(RACF\) preparation](#).
- Aim to provide as much telehealth support as possible, rather than face-to-face. If face-to-face, use personal protective equipment (PPE) and stringent hand washing techniques.
- Sensitively communicate to the person (if possible)/family/substitute decision maker(s) and other care givers that the person is dying. Explain the likely trajectory so that carers are informed of likely changes and that, probably, the person will have a peaceful death. Explain that oxygen will not provide symptomatic relief, given the underlying interstitial pneumonic process.
- Discuss with carers [standard infection control procedures](#), hand hygiene and PPE ([Link 1](#)) ([Link 2](#)).
- Check the person's advance care planning documentation via The Viewer on the [Health Provider Portal](#) so that care can be aligned to the person's preferences.
- Ensure a patient-centred '[medical goals of patient care plan](#)' has been completed including specific limitations of medical treatments, such as withholding of cardiopulmonary resuscitation.
- Review the person's medications and deprescribe non-essential medicines. Cease nebulised medicines to limit infection transmission.
- Proactively prescribe medicines that are likely to be needed for symptom management, especially dyspnoea and agitation. Make sure these medicines are available and charted – [palliMEDS App](#), [Anticipatory Medication-Form](#), [Community Medication list](#), [Guidelines for handling palliative medications in community](#), [Pharmacological Management of Terminal Symptoms in RACFs](#), [Therapeutic Guidelines for Palliative Care v4 \(subscription required\)](#).
- Ensure education is provided for volunteer non-paid carers to safely and confidently manage medicines to provide symptom relief – [caring@home project](#). (This is not relevant to residents of RACFs)
- Ensure 24/7 support line details are provided for non-paid carers to provide reassurance and advice if needed. (This is not relevant to residents of RACFs)
- Arrange for necessary [palliative care equipment](#) to be delivered to the person's home.
- Provide necessary "expected death at home documentation". If medical documentation to the effect that this is an expected death, is in the home this excludes unnecessary involvement of the Queensland Ambulance Service (QAS), police and coroner so that grief is not exacerbated – [Home Death Information](#), [Expected Death Letter](#). (This is not relevant to residents of RACFs)
- Proactively arrange who will complete the [Life Extinct Form](#) (PPE required) and Death Certificate. Ask family/substitute decision maker(s) if a funeral provider has been arranged and remind them to advise the funeral provider that the person has COVID-19.
- Inform carers of how to safely dispose of unused medicines. (This is not relevant to residents of RACFs)
- Organise follow-up bereavement care as required - [PalAssist](#), [Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement](#), [Lifeline](#).
- Based on the information above, document the terminal care management plan. Make the plan available to all those involved in the patient's care so that all are on the same page and carers do not receive conflicting messages. (For RACF residents a [RACF terminal care management plan](#) is freely available from Queensland Health.)
- Review and ensure processes are in place for the [safe management of the deceased](#) that meet infection control guidelines and that self-isolation procedures are understood by all involved in the person's care.

## RESOURCES

- **Palliative Care Outcomes Collaboration (PCOC): Palliative Care Phase Definitions:**  
<https://www.uow.edu.au/ahsri/pcoc/palliative-care/accreditation-standards-quality/>
- **End-of-Life Care Framework – Last Twelve Months of Life Silver Book – Part A, RACGP:**  
<https://www.racgp.org.au/getattachment/af5fe52e-26a8-4e7c-938e-3d876ff73e6b/attachment.aspx?disposition=inline>
- **Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) Coronavirus (COVID-19) information for GPs:**  
<https://www.racgp.org.au/coronavirus>
- **Communicable Diseases Network Australia (CDNA) National guidelines for public health units:**  
<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/cdna-song-novel-coronavirus.htm>
- **Checklist for Residential Aged Care Facility (RACF) preparation:**  
<https://clinicalexcellence.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/improvement/racf-covid-19-preparation-checklist.pdf>
- **Health Pathways - GPs providing palliative care for community-based COVID-19 patients:**  
<https://spotonhealth.communityhealthpathways.org/LoginFiles/Logon.aspx?ReturnUrl=%2f730929.htm>
- **National Palliative Care Service Directory:** <https://nsd.palliativecare.org.au/s/search-service>
- **Australian Guidelines for the Prevention and Control of Infection in Healthcare:**  
<https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/infection-control-guidelines-feb2020.pdf>
- **Personal Protective Equipment:**  
[https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0031/944176/covid-19-ppe-general-practices.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0031/944176/covid-19-ppe-general-practices.pdf)  
[https://www.health.qld.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0035/945755/covid19-correct-use-ppe.pdf](https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0035/945755/covid19-correct-use-ppe.pdf)
- **Register for the Health Provider Portal to access the advance care planning (ACP) Tracker (The Viewer):**  
<https://www.health.qld.gov.au/clinical-practice/database-tools/health-provider-portal/gps-resources/register>
- **Home-based palliative care (Medical Goals of Care Plans):** <https://www1.racgp.org.au/ajgp/2018/november/home-based-palliative-care>
- **palliMEDS App:** <https://www.caringathomeproject.com.au/tabid/5159/Default.aspx>
- **Anticipatory medication form:** <https://metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/anticipatory-medication-form.pdf>
- **Palliative Care Symptom Management Medications for Australians Living in the Community and in Residential Aged Care Facilities (RACFs):** <https://www.caringathomeproject.com.au/Portals/13/Documents/20200323-Medicine-List-updatedV3.pdf>
- **Guide to the Pharmacological Management of End of Life (Terminal) Symptoms in Residential Aged Care Residents:**  
[https://www.caresearch.com.au/Caresearch/Portals/0/PA-Toolkit/Guide to the Pharmacological Management of EoL%28Terminal%29Symptoms in RAC Residents A Resource for GPs.pdf](https://www.caresearch.com.au/Caresearch/Portals/0/PA-Toolkit/Guide%20to%20the%20Pharmacological%20Management%20of%20EoL%28Terminal%29Symptoms%20in%20RAC%20Residents%20A%20Resource%20for%20GPs.pdf)
- **Therapeutic Guidelines for Palliative Care v4 (subscription required):** <https://tgldcdp.tg.org.au/>
- **caring@home Project:** <https://www.caringathomeproject.com.au/>
- **Medical Aids Subsidy Scheme:** <https://www.health.qld.gov.au/mass/prescribe>
- **Home Death Information:** <https://metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/home-death-info.pdf>
- **Expected Death Letter:** <https://metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/expected-death-letter-statewide.pdf>
- **Life Extinct form:** <https://metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/life-extinct-form.pdf>
- **PalAssist:** <https://palassist.org.au/>
- **Australian Centre for Grief and Bereavement:**  
[https://www.grief.org.au/ACGB/Bereavement\\_Support/Counselling\\_1/Counselling.aspx](https://www.grief.org.au/ACGB/Bereavement_Support/Counselling_1/Counselling.aspx)
- **Lifeline:** <https://www.lifeline.org.au/>
- **Residential aged care end-of-life care pathway:** <https://metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/raceolcp>
- **Management of deceased persons who are confirmed or suspected COVID-19 cases:**  
<https://metrosouth.health.qld.gov.au/sites/default/files/covid19-funeral-management.pdf>