

## **What helps?**

A person with a terminal illness needs you to understand that they are more than their illness. Who they are as people, as individuals and as personalities is not defined by their illness. Prior to diagnosis, they had an entire life history including work, responsibility, family, friends, hobbies, likes and dislikes etc. This does not stop because of illness. Naturally there will be changes. As illness develops, patterns will change. Limitations will begin to emerge. Nevertheless, many of our patients tells us that they wish to make their lives as 'normal' as possible. If they are able to work, they wish to continue working. They may wish to socialise with family and friends as much as possible. Indeed is it not uncommon for patients to increase social activity, even making long postponed trips to far flung places. Each person is unique and will decide according to their condition and according to their needs.

## **I don't know what to say or do**

An anxiety for many people with a terminal illness is the prospect of isolation. Isolation can become very real when people keep you away because they don't know what to say or are unsure how to behave. Feeling unsure is normal, but remember nobody expects you to be an expert on caring for the terminally ill. One of the most useful questions you can risk is also a very practical question:

“How can I help?”

People with a terminal illness may have many needs: the need to control pain and symptoms, the need to get financial affairs in order, the need to discuss religious matters. In short these direct needs are unlikely to affect you unless you are medically trained, qualified to give financial advice or are a religious leader. Nobody expects you to resolve problems you don't have the skill set to resolve.