



MEMORANDUM

To: Clinical Oncology Directors and Patient Experience/Relations Directors and Teams
From: Indigenous Cancer Program – Dr. Michael Anderson, Regional Indigenous Cancer Lead, and Leonard Benoit, Regional Indigenous Navigator, Toronto Central Regional Cancer Program

Subject: For Information – Considerations for end of life ceremonies for Indigenous peoples

Situation:

Due to COVID-19, Ontario hospitals have moved to a No Visitor Policy, with exceptions on compassionate grounds and/or other special safety needs. The purposes of this memo is to provide knowledge and awareness on Indigenous perspectives of death for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis (FNIM) peoples.

Background:

Indigenous peoples highly value family and community involvement in decision making around end-of-life issues. Many Indigenous people embrace a circle of life philosophy which recognizes we are spirits having a human experience. As spiritual beings, end-of-life ceremonies are critically important to prepare and empower one's spirit for the journey. End-of-life ceremonies can reflect a traditional person's name, clan, nation and accomplishments. When dying, a traditional person will call for the ceremonies, medicines and prayers that will guide his/her spirit back to the spirit world. Ceremonies may include a pipe ceremony, smudging, drumming, singing, prayers, and cleaning and dressing the body.

“At death, our original mother, mother earth who nourishes our bodies reclaims our physical form. Our original father, the creator, takes our spirit to return to the place of our origin”

Assessment:

Indigenous peoples, both patients and families, who are near or at end-of-life may be requesting an exception for visitor(s) to support their death journey.

Recommendation:

When reviewing and granting exceptions for the no visitor policy, please be mindful of the importance of family, community and spiritual leaders during the end-of-life journey for Indigenous peoples.

Attached are some additional resources that may be helpful in continuing to support our Indigenous patients and families during this time.

If you have any further questions or need support, please contact **Leonard Benoit, Indigenous – Patient Navigator, Toronto Central Regional Cancer Program** at 416-864-6060 ext. 2422 (office) | 647-309-1794 (mobile) | Leonard.Benoit@unityhealth.to