

Surges of Energy

One to two days prior to death, patients may have a surge of energy. They may be able to physically do things they were previously incapable of doing and may become mentally alert and verbal when they were previously disoriented and withdrawn.

Dying patients may also have a sudden surge in appetite. This is often confusing for the families who were anticipating death and now see their loved one as physically, mentally, and spiritually “renewed”. They may take this as a sign of recovery; only to have the patient's condition quickly change and death occur.

For many patients, this is a time of reprieve and energy to deal with unfinished business and closure issues. As such, this is also a good time to instruct families about this phenomenon and encourage them to settle unfinished business with the patient, communicate openly, and say their final goodbyes.

This unexpected, unexplainable energy may also be confusing to the hospice professional who was anticipating the patient's death. Frequently this phenomenon is known as “the calm before the storm”. After this surge, however, the patient usually declines rapidly and the signs and symptom of approaching death resume.