

# TUBE FEEDING AT THE END OF LIFE

*A medical reminder from Covenant Hospice to help you deal with issues of death and dying affecting your patients and their families.*

In making the decision of whether to institute tube feedings in a patient at the end of life, the potential benefits and burdens should be explored with the patient and family.

Potential Benefits: 1) prolongation of life for a person who cannot be fed by mouth, 2) delivery of quantifiable amounts of nutrition and hydration, 3) ease of staff time and effort for feeding 4) reimbursement as a skilled nursing need. Although there is no data to support the following, they have been proposed as possible benefits: 1) reduction or healing of skin ulcers, 2) reduction of aspiration, 3) lessening of hunger or thirst, 4) maintenance of nutritional indices.

Potential Burdens: 1) prolongation of life when quality of life is poor, 2) restraints to keep patient from dislodging the tube, 3) decreased pleasure of human touch and of smell and taste of food, 4) medicalization of the dying process, 5) increased volume of stool, urine, and secretions 6) increased risk of aspiration, 7) increased risk of skin ulcers due to increased volume of stool and urine, 8) bloating, weight gain, 9) hemorrhage or infection of the tube site (rare), 10) loss of human intimacy and attention during feeding, 11) dry mouth if oral feeding is proscribed.