

## **BREATHLESSNESS or SHORTNESS OF BREATH** (Dyspnea)

When breathlessness occurs in the late stages of a disease the goal of treatment is comfort. In addition to providing oxygen and other treatments, some medications can help decrease the feeling of shortness of breath.

Morphine, a narcotic drug usually given for pain, is the most helpful medication. It is given in a low dose to decrease the feeling of breathlessness. It usually makes the patient more comfortable and causes the breathing rate to slow to normal. Depending on the circumstances, morphine can be given by mouth, in the rectum, under the skin (subcutaneously), or by vein (intravenously). The dose may need increased until the shortness of breath is relieved.

What else may help?

- Cool wash cloths to the face

- Keeping the room cool and not crowded

- Blowing a fan across the patient's face

- Playing music that helps the patient relax

Prepared by the Morgantown Regional Palliative Care Services  
Of the WV Initiative to Improve End-of-Life Care