

Making hard decisions about care

Critical choices about antibiotics for infections

When the body's systems are no longer working without supports, infections are more likely. Lines and catheters are common ways for bacteria to enter. When the body is not able to remove fluids because of failing organs, infections have good places to start – in the bladder/kidneys, in the lungs, in any of the tissues. Even though antibiotics may control one infection they will not restore the body's ability to fight off the next one. When and how long to use antibiotic treatments for your child may become an issue. Will giving more antibiotics fit with a focus on a quality life and comfortable death?

Question: How much of a burden will it be to continue to give antibiotics?

These are some of the issues to consider when making this decision for your child:

- * Can she swallow the medicine easily?
- * Does it taste bad?
- * Are there unpleasant side effects?
- * Must the antibiotic be given through an IV?
Is the line in place or will he have to have a needle poke?
- * Can he receive the antibiotics where he is, or will this mean a move back into hospital?
- * When you weigh these things you may decide to continue, or not, with antibiotic treatment.

Question: Aren't antibiotics the best way to keep a child with an infection comfortable?

When comfort is your main concern, you may find that there are easier ways to manage the symptoms of an infection. (Refer to the infection/fever handout.)

Question: Will getting this infection under control make any real difference to the quality of the rest of her life?

This question needs answers to other questions:
Is she looking at more and more infection?
What happens if we do not treat the infection?

At the end stages of life, infections may happen quickly and often.

It may come to the point when antibiotic treatment seems a needless burden.

Like all the other choices you make, calling on the experience of health professionals and the evidence of research will help you.

This pamphlet is the result of a collaboration between
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