

How Can Palliative Care Help Me?

Palliative care is provided to people who are facing serious illness and their families. This specialized care is aimed at relieving suffering and helping individuals and their families understand all possible treatment options, with special emphasis on managing the pain or symptoms that may accompany serious illness. Palliative care helps the patient and family express their wishes and goals for the course of the disease. Once the goals and wishes are determined, the team provides support and guidance in reaching the goals.

The role of the palliative care team is to facilitate communication and understanding among the patient, family and providers of care, with the hope that the person and family will experience the highest possible satisfaction with the care they receive.

Symptom management, which is a primary goal of palliative care, focuses on relieving pain, shortness of breath, nausea, vomiting, constipation, fatigue, loss of appetite and difficulty sleeping that many times go along with disease or treatments to cure the disease. It has been shown that when these distressing symptoms are managed it's more likely that the course of treatment will be completed.

Palliative care may be provided at any stage of the illness and at the same time as curative treatments.

Who Can Benefit From Palliative Care?

A wide variety of patients can benefit from palliative care including: those who have been diagnosed with a complex, serious illness who desire relief from pain or symptoms associated with the disease; those who need to make difficult decisions about how to proceed with care and treatment; and those who need assistance with communication issues related to care and treatment can all benefit from palliative care.

Likely diagnoses might include cancer, heart disease, kidney failure, respiratory disease, Alzheimer's disease, Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS), multiple sclerosis and others. Palliative care might also be appropriate for anyone who has had multiple hospitalizations or Emergency Department visits over the previous year.

Who Provides Palliative Care?

Typically, palliative care is provided by a team of professionals that may include physicians, advanced practice nurses, registered nurses, social workers, chaplains, pharmacists and dietitians. The professionals that make up the team depend on the needs of the patient and their family.

» Where is Palliative Care Provided?

Palliative care may be provided in a variety of healthcare settings, such as hospitals, nursing homes, hospices, assisted living facilities or out-patient clinics. For some individuals, it may be switching from one setting to another that contributes to confusion and poor communication. With palliative care in place, there is increased likelihood of enhanced communication resulting in the development of the most effective treatment plan.

» How is Palliative Care Paid For?

That's a good question to ask when speaking to the palliative care team on your first visit.

In some communities it may be covered by grants or offered on a sliding fee scale. In other communities it is covered by Medicare, Medicaid and private insurance and is handled much like a referral to a cardiologist, neurologist or other specialist.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Contact Caring Connections

- www.caringinfo.org
- caringinfo@nhpco.org
- HelpLine 800.658.8898
- Multilingual Line 877.658.8896

» How Can I Get Palliative Care in My Community?

Ask your primary care physician for a referral to palliative care. Keep in mind that receiving palliative care does not interrupt your relationship with your primary physician but rather enhances the effectiveness of the care you receive.

» Who Provides Palliative Care in Your Community?

