

Palliative Care

Frequently Asked Questions

(Palliative Care, 2016)

When is Palliative Care Appropriate?

Patients who are coping with a serious illness can benefit from palliative care at any time during their treatment. These patients may still be receiving treatment aimed at a cure. Palliative care is provided by a team of trained healthcare professionals with clinical expertise in:

- understanding disease processes and their effects on quality of life
- treatment and care options based on patient needs and support
- pain and symptom management.

The Palliative Care Team typically sees patients:

- at the time of a new diagnosis
- when a serious illness/injury is impacting their quality of life
- in preparation for the end of life

The team is skilled in helping patients cope with illness and the effects it can have on their families and caregivers.

Comfort and quality of life are important at every stage of illness, and these aspects of palliative care are why the team works with the patient, their family, and the patient's care providers to ensure that these issues are given the attention they deserve.

What are the Goals of Palliative Care?

The goal of palliative care is to provide the needed support for patients facing a life-threatening or life-limiting illness that allows them to maintain or improve their quality of life.

Specialists focus on this by working to relieve pain and other symptoms (such as trouble breathing, nausea, worry or stress) during the course of a serious illness, as well as working to find out what patients and families expect from their medical care. This allows us to help patients and families understand their situation, support them through their hospital stay, and work to find the needed support for their care outside the hospital or clinic setting.

Palliative care can be delivered at any time during a disease course, from the first diagnosis to the end stages of an illness. It can also be delivered in conjunction with a patient's active treatment such as chemotherapy. By helping patients feel their best

during their treatment and allowing them to decide their "goals of care," our palliative care team can help ease many of the burdens that come with serious illness.

How Do Palliative Care and Hospice Care Differ?

When people look up "palliative care," they often quickly see mentions of an idea called "hospice care." It is important to understand that these are two different types of care.

Palliative care is not the same as hospice care. Palliative Care is for anyone with a serious illness or injury and is available for patients at any time in their treatment process. It focuses on improving symptoms and helping in discussions of what patients want from their medical care.

Hospice care is a special type of medical care that is available for those individuals who may have less than six months to live. Hospice is way of giving medical care in the patient's home or care facility that is focused on maintaining comfort for those who no longer have curative treatments or who do not want to continue the process of life-extending therapies.

For many patients and families, questions about "when" or "if" hospice is the right thing for patients may arise. Palliative care visits may include education or discussions about hospice care options, if this type of care could be helpful in caring for those struggling with serious illness.

Who Provides Palliative Care?

The palliative care team will be led by specialty-trained expert doctors and nurse practitioners and also includes specialized palliative care case managers and highly trained palliative care social workers. We also work closely with other specialists throughout the hospital, including pastoral care, child life and pharmacy.

Doctors and nurse practitioners: evaluate and treat your symptoms, assist you with complicated medical conversations and situations that occur at the end of life, and will help you establish goals of your care that are consistent with your beliefs, values, and wishes.

Case managers: provide resources and placement options and work with members of the primary team to coordinate home needs, nursing facility placements, or hospice support when appropriate.

Social workers: provide emotional and social support and help you understand health care planning for the future, such as creating an advance care plan.

Pastoral care: maintaining the important role that faith and spirit play in the lives of our patients.

Child life specialists: meet with children and their families to help discuss and understand difficult situations that a patient may face. By using developmentally-appropriate techniques for children of any age, our Child Life experts can also help families by sharing advice on how to talk with children as they cope with the illness of a loved one.

Pharmacy staff: ensure that our patients' prescriptions are accurate and assist in the acquisition of unusual or difficult-to-obtain medications necessary to treat symptoms.

Reference(s):

Palliative Care. (2016). Retrieved December 27, 2016, from Vanderbilt Health:
<https://www.vanderbilthealth.com/palliativecare/>