

PROVISION OF SERVICES IN PALLIATIVE CARE

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What is the palliative care? Say “palliative care” and most people imagine cancer patients being made comfortable in an end-life hospice setting.

But palliative care is actually a new medical specialty that has emerged in the last decade and it’s not the same as hospice. It does not serve only the dying. Instead, it focuses more broadly on improving life and providing comfort to people of all ages with serious, chronic, and life-threatening illnesses.

Typically, a palliative care team includes a physician, nurse, and social worker. But it often involves a chaplain, psychologist or psychiatrist, physical or occupational therapist, dietitian, and others, depending on the patient’s needs.

While palliative care seem to offer a broad range of services, the goals of palliative treatment are concrete: relief from suffering, treatment of pain and other distressing symptoms, psychological and spiritual care, a support system to help the individual live as actively as possible, and a support system to sustain and rehabilitate the individual’s family.

With all its emphasis on the whole person – even one’s family and relationships, does palliative care truly improve quality of life?

When it comes to quality of life, each patient has his or her own vision. Each suffering is unique. Each individual is unique. There is no generalization and that’s the key. Palliative care is genuinely patient-centered, meaning: the team asks the patients what’s important to them and what their major priorities are. For some people, the goal or value might be to live as long as possible – no matter what the quality. Bases on what the patients or the family tell, the team develops a care plan and a strategy that meets the patients’ goals an values.

While some patients will want to discuss psychological or spiritual concerns and some will not, it is fundamentally important to assess each individual and their partners and families need for this type of support. Denying an individual and their support system an opportunity to explore psychological or spiritual concerns is just as harmful as forcing them to deal with issues they either don’t have or choose not to deal with.

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