



## What is Palliative Care?

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**Palliative Care** is specialized medical care designed to improve quality of life for people with serious illness. This type of care is focused on providing relief from the symptoms and stress of a serious illness and can be provided alongside other curative treatments from your physicians. **Palliative Care** is often provided by specially trained doctors, nurses and other specialists who work together with your doctors to provide an extra layer of support. However, in the early stages of illness this type of care can also be provided by your primary doctors. Even if you receive care from a specialized Palliative Care team your primary doctors will continue to direct your care and play an active role in your treatment. **Palliative Care** is appropriate at any age and at any stage of a serious illness.

### Benefits provided by **Palliative Care**:

- Relief from physical pain and other symptoms such as shortness of breath, fatigue, constipation, nausea, loss of appetite, sleeping difficulties and depression so you can better tolerate medical treatments.
- Help with social, emotional and spiritual needs
- A better understanding of your condition and your choices for medical care.
- Assistance in helping you and your family cope with the burdens of serious illness such as side effects from treatment, caregiver stress and fears about the future.

The goal of **Palliative Care** is to improve the quality of life for patients with serious illness and their families.

## *Palliative Care*

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### *Who Should Receive Palliative Care?*

**Palliative Care** is helpful for patients experiencing pain, stress or other symptoms due to serious and chronic illnesses such as cancer, cardiac diseases like congestive heart failure (CHF), chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), kidney failure, Alzheimer's, Parkinson's Disease and Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS). When these patients are experiencing multiple ER visits or hospitalizations, declining ability to manage activities of daily living or exhibiting physical, psychological or spiritual distress, **Palliative Care** can be a great benefit.

### *Where Do I Receive Palliative Care?*

**Palliative Care** services are provided in a variety of settings including the hospital, outpatient clinic or doctor's office and at home. Your doctor can determine the setting that is right for you.

### *Does My Insurance Cover Palliative Care?*

Many insurance providers offer complete or partial coverage for **Palliative Care**, just like other hospital and medical services. Medicare Part B and Medicaid cover some palliative care medications, treatments and home visits from doctors and nurses as part of standard benefits. Your doctor or **Palliative Care** team can help you and your family understand coverage and payment options.



## *Palliative Care*

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### *How do I know if I am ready for Palliative Care?*

Since Palliative Care is focused on providing relief from the symptoms and stress of a serious illness it can be provided at any stage of the illness along with curative treatment. Your health care team can help you decide when **Palliative Care** services would be helpful. Questions to take into consideration include:

- What additional options are available for treating my illness?
- What is most important to me and what do I want now and as my illness progresses?
- What options are available for control of my symptoms?
- What is the nature and course of my illness?

Conversations with your doctors addressing the above questions can help you both decide what level of **Palliative Care** is needed and if a formal palliative program provided by hospitals and community agencies would be best or your doctors alone can continue to manage your symptoms. Remember in both cases your primary doctors will be involved in your care.

### *How do I get Palliative Care?*

Your doctor may already be providing **Palliative Care** in helping you to manage pain and other symptoms of your illness and treatment. However, if you are experiencing increasing emotional and physical distress you can ask for a referral to a palliative care team of specialty trained doctors, nurses and other specialists to work in partnership with your doctors to provide an extra layer of support to you and your family.

## *More about Palliative Care*

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In recent years **Palliative Care** advocates are promoting a combined approach to care of patients with serious or life limiting illnesses. This means the comfort of palliative care is provided even while the disease is being treated. This approach helps patients make more informed decisions about their care. The World Health Organization (WHO) defines palliative care as “applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life.”

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Choosing **Palliative Care** does not mean your doctors and you are “giving up” on your recovery. Patients can receive this specialized care while undergoing treatments that may cure or reverse an illness. **Palliative Care** controls symptoms, while enabling patients to fight the disease and live the best quality of life. It also provides a layer of support to your care givers by helping them cope with the burden of caring for a loved one with a serious illness.

*Ask your doctor if Palliative Care is an option for you.*

