

Palliative Care

Definition of Palliative Care

The goal of palliative care is to prevent and relieve suffering and improve quality of life for people facing serious, life-threatening illness. It is appropriate at any point in a serious illness and can be delivered along with curative treatment.



Palliative care is a new medical specialty. Multiple studies have demonstrated that palliative care improves health care quality in three domains: the relief of physical and emotional suffering; the strengthening of patient-family-physician communication and decision making; and the assurance of well-coordinated care across multiple health care settings — hospital, home, hospice and long-term care.

At the forefront of patient-centered care, palliative care affirms life by supporting patient and family goals for the future, including their hopes for cure or life-prolongation, as well as comfort and control.

Comprehensive palliative care integrates the expertise of an interdisciplinary team of health care professionals, in order to effectively assess and address the complex needs of seriously ill patients and their families. Palliative care teams typically include physicians, nurses and social workers, with additional support from chaplaincy, nutrition, rehabilitation, pharmacy and other professional disciplines, as needed.

Adapted from Morrison RS, Meier DE. Palliative Care. *N. Engl J Med.* 2004; 350:2585–90.

For more information on the Clinical Practice Guidelines for Quality Palliative Care, visit www.nationalconsensusproject.org



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