

Palliative Care

Definition of Palliative Care

The goal of palliative care is to prevent and relieve suffering and to ensure the best quality of life for patients with advanced chronic and life-threatening illnesses. It is offered simultaneously with all other appropriate medical treatment.



Palliative medicine is a medical specialty that is both a philosophy of care and an organized, highly structured system for delivering care. Multiple studies have demonstrated that palliative care improves health care quality in three domains: the relief of physical and emotional suffering; improvement and strengthening of the process of patient-physician communication and decision-making; and assurance of coordinated continuity of care across multiple healthcare settings – hospital, home, hospice and long-term care.

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

Comprehensive palliative care services integrate the expertise of a team of providers from different disciplines in order to adequately assess and address the complex needs of seriously ill patients and their families. Members of a palliative care team typically include professionals from medicine, nursing, and social work, 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



Center to Advance Palliative Care

1255 Fifth Avenue, Suite C-2
New York, NY 10029
Phone 212.201.2670
Fax 212.426.1369
www.capc.org



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