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## **Palliative Care**

**From: VITAS Healthcare (vitas.com)**

### **What Is Palliative Care?**

Palliative care is care that provides relief from symptoms resulting from disease or injury. In comparison to curative care, which is meant to cure a disease, palliative care is meant to make the patient more comfortable. The definition of palliative care is "to make a disease or its symptoms less severe or unpleasant without removing the cause." Palliative care will lessen or "palliate" the symptoms and improve your quality of life.

### **Is Palliative Care the Same as Hospice Care?**

No. While palliative and hospice care both address symptoms, hospice is appropriate only in the last six months of life, as estimated by the patient's physician. Hospice is offered in place of curative treatment, whereas the comfort of palliative care is available at any time in a patient's disease, from diagnosis and throughout curative treatments.

### **What Are the Goals of Palliative Care?**

- Aligning treatment outcomes with the patient's values and preferences
- Improving quality of life for both the patient and the family
- Minimizing pain and discomfort
- Alleviating emotional distress, anxiety, or depression
- Assisting with safety, mobility, and equipment
- Spiritual counseling
- Empowering patients and caregivers to make decisions that are right for them

### **Who Is on the Palliative Care Team?**

Palliative care is most often provided by a team of professionals very similar to an interdisciplinary hospice team. Clinical evaluation and care discussions are usually

provided by physicians, nurse practitioners, and RNs. At times, social workers and chaplains are also involved.

### **What Are the Benefits of Palliative Care?**

Palliative care provides relief in a variety of ways. Physical symptoms such as pain, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea/vomiting and sleep loss can all be mitigated with palliative approaches, whether through drugs, nutrition, deep breathing, or acupuncture. For patients and families struggling to cope with a serious diagnosis, palliative care can address depression, anxiety, and fear by employing counseling, support groups, family meetings, and the like.

### **What Is Included in Palliative Care?**

Palliative care begins with a conversation to determine the patient's symptoms, needs, and any medications that may provide relief. For some patients, ending medications that cause uncomfortable side effects is offered as a palliative option. The patient's needs also may be met using approaches that don't rely on medication, such as specialized nutrition or breathing exercises. For additional relief, the palliative care team can introduce complementary therapies to address specific symptoms.

The specifics of palliative care vary from case to case, as treatments are intended to address a patient's unique needs and tolerance for discomfort.

The palliative care team routinely communicates with the patient to determine the intensity of their pain and other symptoms. Based on that information, they assess appropriate treatment options together. When a patient is unable to communicate or otherwise unable to self-report pain or other bothersome symptoms, the care team relies on pain assessment tools and clinical judgment to facilitate symptom relief.

### **How Long Can You Be in Palliative Care?**

Palliative care can occur at any point in life, for any duration, and it can occur in conjunction with curative care. Hospice care, which includes palliative care, is designed to provide comfort and dignity in the last six months of a patient's life.

Research suggests that earlier initiation of palliative care has a positive impact on patient and family satisfaction with the care they receive, patient perceptions of pain, and even patient survival rates. A hospice patient who chooses to discontinue hospice services can continue to receive palliative care.