What is palliative care?

PalliativeCare
AUSTRALIA

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Quality care at the end of life is specialised care and support that recognises the unique needs of a person who has a terminal condition, and their family and carers.

What kind of care is available?

Most people with a terminal condition will be cared for by their general practitioner and community nurses. These health professionals are supported by specialist palliative care services to ensure all people receive the highest quality care to meet their needs.

The goal is to improve quality of life for patients, their families and carers by providing care that addresses the many needs patients, families and carers have such as physical (including treatment of pain and other symptoms), emotional, social, cultural and spiritual.

The aim is to help the person live as well as possible. Support is also offered to help family and carers manage during the patient's illness and in bereavement.

As a person receiving care, the patient is an important partner in planning their care and managing their condition. Family and carers also have an important role in this area. When people are well informed, participate in treatment decisions and communicate openly with their doctors and other health professionals, they help make their care as effective as possible.

Care planning is an important process in ensuring the patient's wishes, in relation to care, are met. Patients should speak to their doctor about anticipating their changing needs through advance care planning. Discussions about appointing a substitute decision maker may also be important.

What is specialist palliative care?

A small number of people experience severe or complex problems as their condition advances. These people may be referred to a specialist palliative care service where a team of specialist professionals will work to meet their needs.

Alternatively, the patient's general practitioner may seek advice from a specialist palliative care service on the patient's behalf.

Can I still have active treatment for my illness?

Yes – treatment aimed at curing illness can often be continued. The focus of care is maintaining quality of life and meeting the needs of the person, their family and carers.

YOU CAN CONSULT THE NATIONAL PALLIATIVE CARE SERVICE DIRECTORY TO FIND A SERVICE THAT PROVIDES CARE IN YOUR AREA.

Who provides care?

Care can be provided by a number of different health professionals, depending on:

- the needs of the patient
- the resources and needs of the family and carers.

Many health professionals may be involved in delivering care and generally they will work as part of an interdisciplinary team. A care team may include:

- general practitioners;
- specialist palliative care doctors and nurses;
- specialist doctors – oncologists, cardiologists, neurologists, respiratory physicians;
- nurses;
- allied health professionals – pharmacists, occupational therapists, physiotherapists;
- social workers;
- grief and bereavement counsellors;
- pastoral care workers;
- volunteers.

Who should I talk to about palliative care?

You can talk about your needs with your doctor or regular care team. You can also consult the National Palliative Care Service Directory to find a service that provides care in your area.

Where can I receive care?

Care can be provided in:

- the home;
- a hospital;
- an aged care home;
- a hospice.

Most people with a terminal condition prefer to receive care at home, but this will depend on many factors, including:

- the nature of the illness;
- how much support is available from the person's family and community;
- whether the person has someone who can care for them.

If I am in pain, how will it be eased?

Not everyone with a terminal condition will experience pain. If patients do experience pain, in almost all cases it can be relieved.

There are many pain management medicines that can be given in different ways – tablets, liquids, injections, patches. There is also a wide range of medicines and other treatments that can be combined to improve pain relief.

Some complementary therapies, such as massage, acupuncture or aromatherapy can also be helpful in relieving pain.

Where can I find more information?

Palliative Care Australia provides a variety of online information about different care and support options. To access these resources go to www.palliativecare.org.au or click on the links below.

National Palliative Care Service Directory: An online searchable directory of palliative and end of life care services across Australia.

How can I support my friend or family member?: Strategies for making a difference to help you help someone you know who is living with a terminal condition.

Understanding grief: Information about grief and bereavement.

Asking questions can help: A list of questions you may wish to ask when you are seeing a member of the palliative care team.

Facts about morphine and other opioids: Information on the facts and myths about medicines used in palliative care.

Learn more about pain management: Information about pain and how it can be controlled.

The dying process: A brochure that guides you through what happens when someone is dying.

Standards for providing quality palliative care for all Australians: A list of standards that guide the delivery of quality palliative care in Australia.

YOU CAN FIND MORE SUPPORT INFORMATION AND RESOURCES LIKE THIS ON OUR WEBSITE

Disclaimer: PCA provides these links for information purpose only. It is not responsible for the content of these websites.

Contact Palliative Care Australia

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Palliative Care Australia is funded by the Australian Government.

Australian Government Department of Health