

# Who's that Palliative Care mob?



## *Cultural sensitivity warning*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this resource contains materials of a sensitive nature and discusses Sad News and Sorry Business.



## Dedication

*Who's that palliative care mob?* It's a tribute to a lady I once knew named Patsy; she went through a cancer journey with breast cancer and I remember the point where she was told that she wasn't going to make it no matter what treatments she continued to have.

She came to terms with it and I remember having a conversation with her where she introduced me to the idea of palliative care.

I was totally against it at the time. I thought it was kind of giving up. I kept saying to her, "Don't worry, you will get better. You don't need them". I was in total denial.

As Patsy got sicker, I realised I may be wrong in my belief. Patsy and I sat down one day and had a very similar conversation to the one in this story. Following this, Patsy organised the palliative care team to talk to me and my brothers about her health. It was a very difficult time having to realise that she was going to die and accepting she couldn't be fixed. It was like a light turned on in my head and thinking about our previous conversation, I realised palliative care was not only her wish but it was also what was best for her and the family.

In May that year Patsy passed away at her sister's home surrounded by family, with all her wishes being fulfilled. She went in peace and the family managed the sad time better than I could have ever imagined. There were no arguments; everyone was on the same page mainly because of the help of the palliative care team.

The Patsy I refer to in this story was my mother,  
Patricia Mary Dodson/Jauncey.

*Jonathan Dodson/Jauncey*



"Hey, I just visited Uncle at the aged care. Not good news: the doctor said he's real crook and there's not a lot they can do. All they can do is make him comfortable and at some stage he may have to go to the hospital. Eventually he's going to pass away. They said something about palliative care: what's this palliative care?"

"That's sad news Uncle is crook, and palliative care is the care provided to people who become sick and can't get better again. Medicines or surgery can't help anymore, that's when they can get palliative care to get the best out of the time they have left, until they pass. Remember when Mum got really sick from the cancer before she passed away? Well, remember all them medical mob that helped her and us then?"

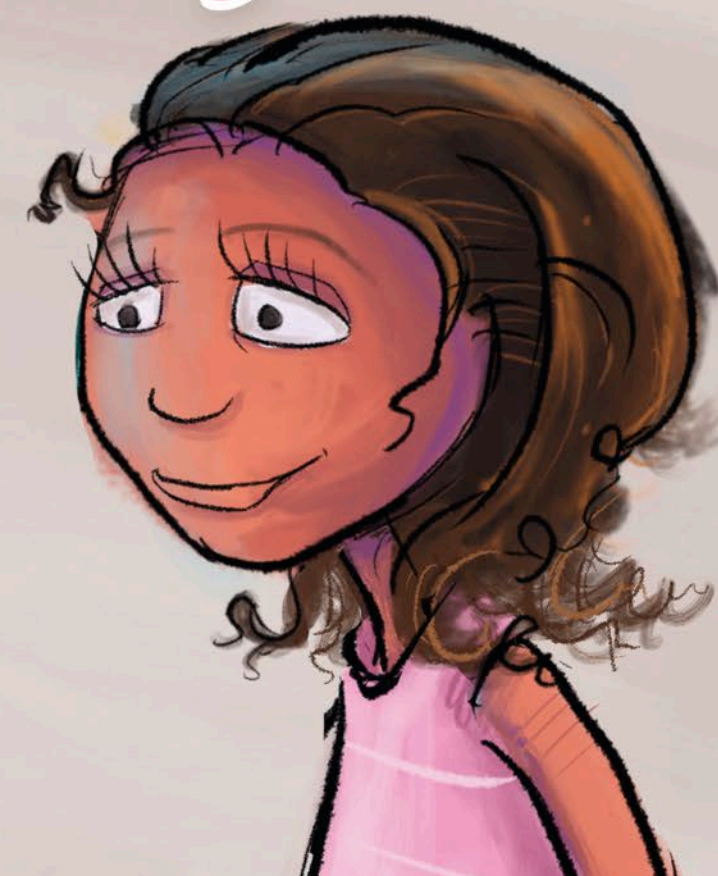






"Yeah, I remember them doctors and nurses, the Aboriginal health worker and the social worker. I remember the priest fulla came out too."

"That's them, they were part of the palliative care team. Remember when she was getting all that pain and they helped?"



"That's right I remember. They couldn't make her better but they made her comfortable. I remember when we had that family meeting and they came along and helped us to make a plan so she could come home. She didn't want to stay in hospital or have all them tubes down her throat."





"That's right, that plan helped her get home. They listened to everything Mum wanted and wrote it all down on a thing called an advance care plan. Remember she wanted Uncle to be in charge and speak for her?"

"Yeah, I remember all the jobs she wanted us to do for her as well. I was proud she wanted me to care for her. It was a sad time but I remember that palliative care mob made things easier for us with all their help. There was even that night when Mum was in all that pain. I remember we were able to call them even though it was so late and they told us what to do and how we could help Mum relax. They even came around the next day to make sure she was okay."

"Yeah, that's right, and do you remember when they came around home and fixed up Mum's bathroom so it was a bit easier for her to go to the toilet and have a shower?"

"They even gave us that wheelchair so we could still go visit family, and the oxygen bottle to help her breathe sometimes. It used to really worry me when she had trouble breathing."





"Do you remember Mum always said she wanted all the mob around when she passed away?"

"I'll always remember that night. That nurse came and told Uncle it was time to start contacting family; they knew she was going to pass away. It was sad but I was happy all the family got there, I could feel Mum knew everyone was there too."

"I think it helped her to settle knowing all her wishes happened. I reckon that made it easier for her to return to Spirit and start that next part of her journey."



Later that night

"So did they say anything else about Uncle being crook?"

"They said that because of his illness, his life has been shortened. They are not sure exactly how long: could be six months, could be a year. They said that the medicines and surgery can't help him anymore."



"Hmm, I've been worried for him. I know we keep having to send him to hospital more and more. I think this is the tenth time this year. He's definitely getting weaker and I notice he needs more and more help eating, moving around and looking after himself."

"Yeah, our old fulla."

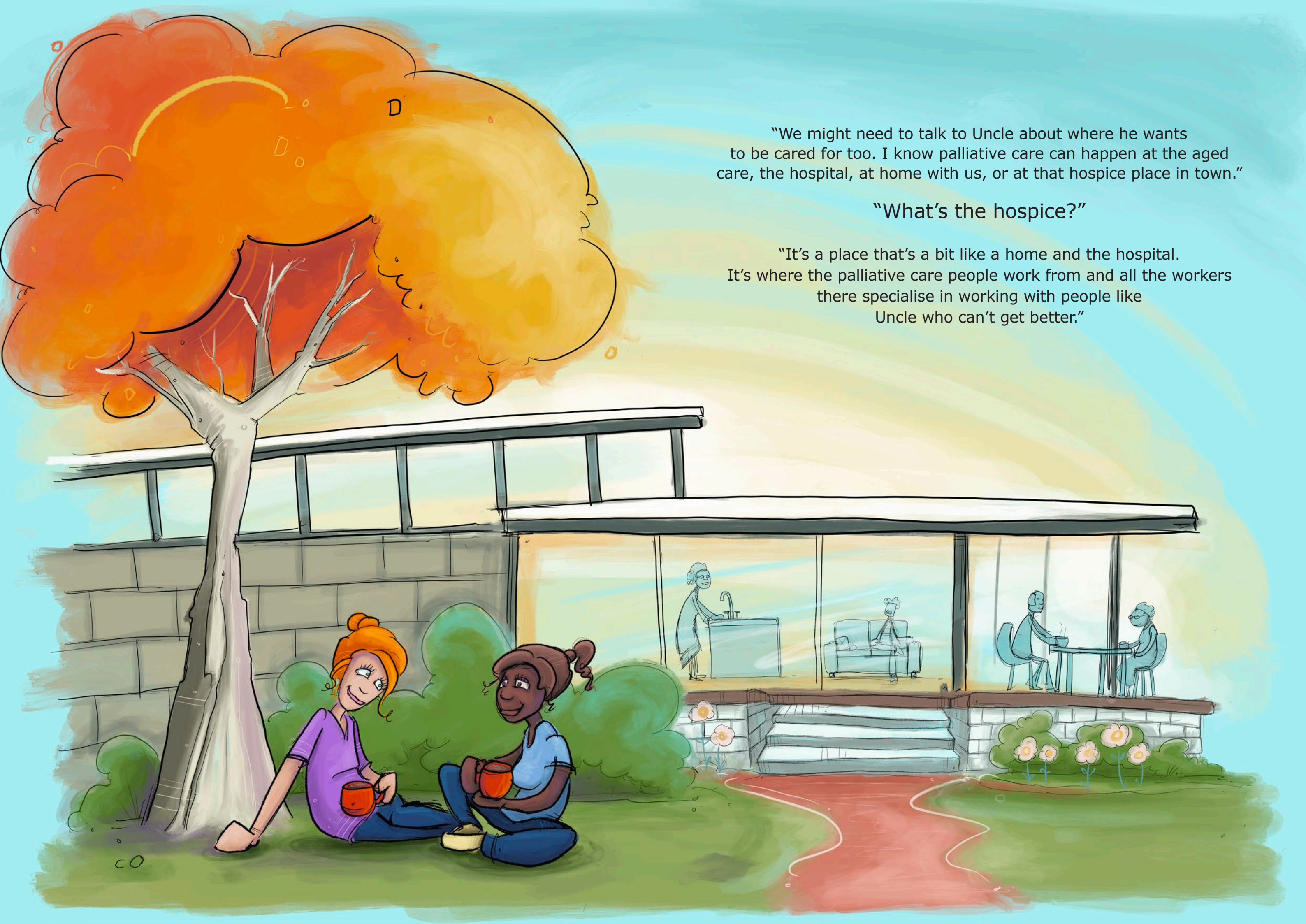
"I think it might be time to talk to that palliative care mob."



"We might need to talk to Uncle about where he wants to be cared for too. I know palliative care can happen at the aged care, the hospital, at home with us, or at that hospice place in town."

"What's the hospice?"

"It's a place that's a bit like a home and the hospital. It's where the palliative care people work from and all the workers there specialise in working with people like Uncle who can't get better."





"I remember the Aboriginal health worker, the doctors and nurses, the social worker and the priest. Is there other mob who work for palliative care?"

"Yeah, there are a lot more. Each palliative care mob is different but when Mum was helped by them, we had an occupational therapist. She helped by fixing up home and with the wheelchair. Mum had a personal carer to help with all the little things like getting comfortable, having a shower, looking after her teeth and mouth and going toilet. I guess you could say the traditional healer we organised is part of that team too. And there was that physiotherapist that helped massage Mum when she was in pain."



Physiotherapist

Doctor

Volunteer

Aboriginal  
Health Practitioner

Traditional Healer

Nurse

Social Worker



"There were also the volunteers that sometimes came and took Mum out for visits and go shopping before she got too crook. That helped us to rest and look after ourselves so we could stay strong for Mum."

"So, the palliative care mob is kind of like a one stop shop for anyone who's crook and not gonna get better?"

"Yeah, you could say that."

"Hmm, I definitely think that's what Uncle needs. I'll yarn with him about it tonight."

"You should get the doctor from the hospital and the Aboriginal health worker to come visit and help you yarn with Uncle. The doctor can explain all about palliative care, and if Uncle wants that mob helping, they can organise it all for him. Uncle might want to think about it first."

"Yeah, I'll yarn with him first so he can think about it and make sure he's okay with me contacting them."





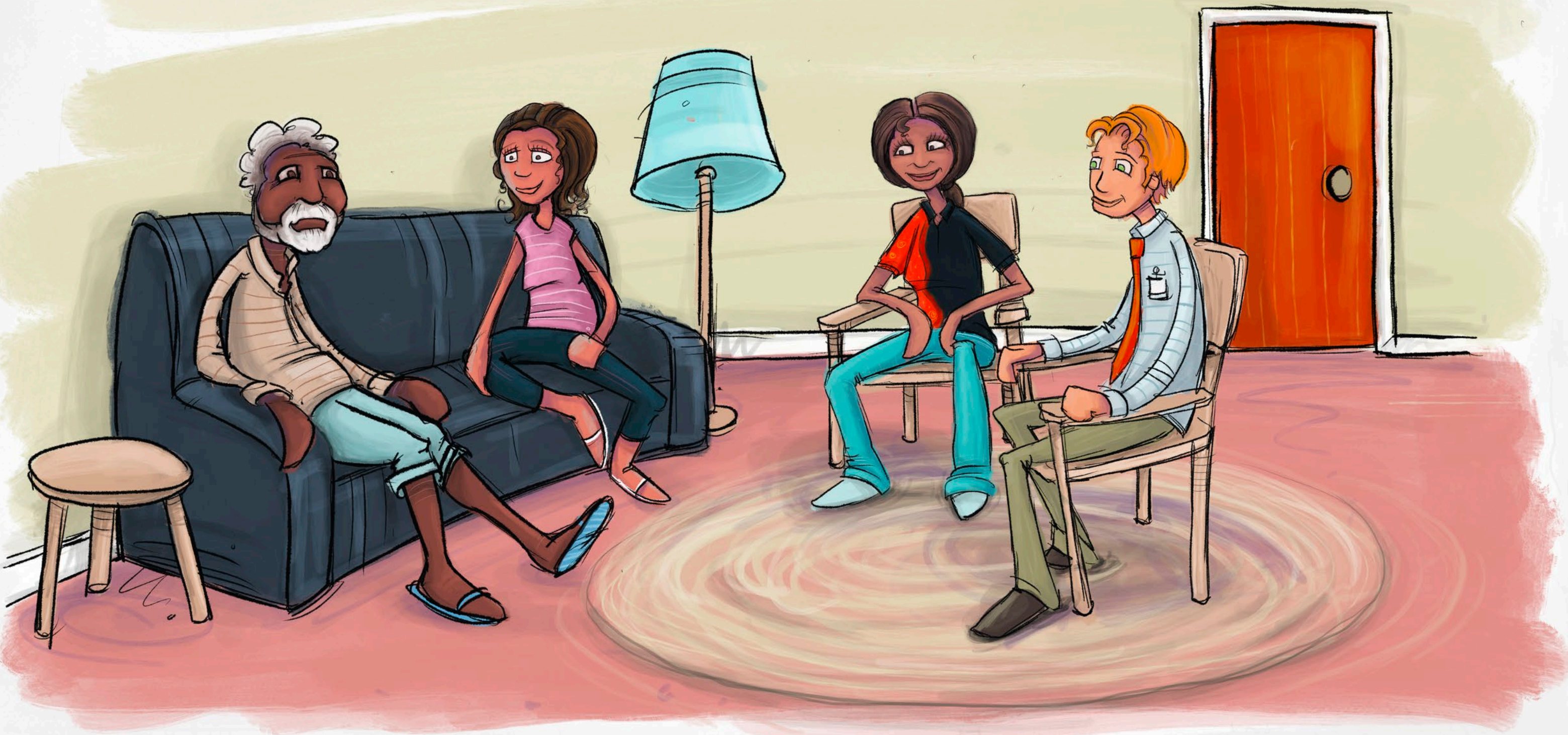
## Next Day

"I'm glad we yarned yesterday. I spoke with Uncle last night about all that palliative care stuff. The doctor and the Aboriginal health worker came in for a bit this morning and helped me yarn with him about it all."

"How'd it go?"

"Yeah, it was good, aye. Uncle really opened up. He's worried about a few things but he really listened and spoke up. I could tell he was relieved after."

"That's good. What was he worried about?"





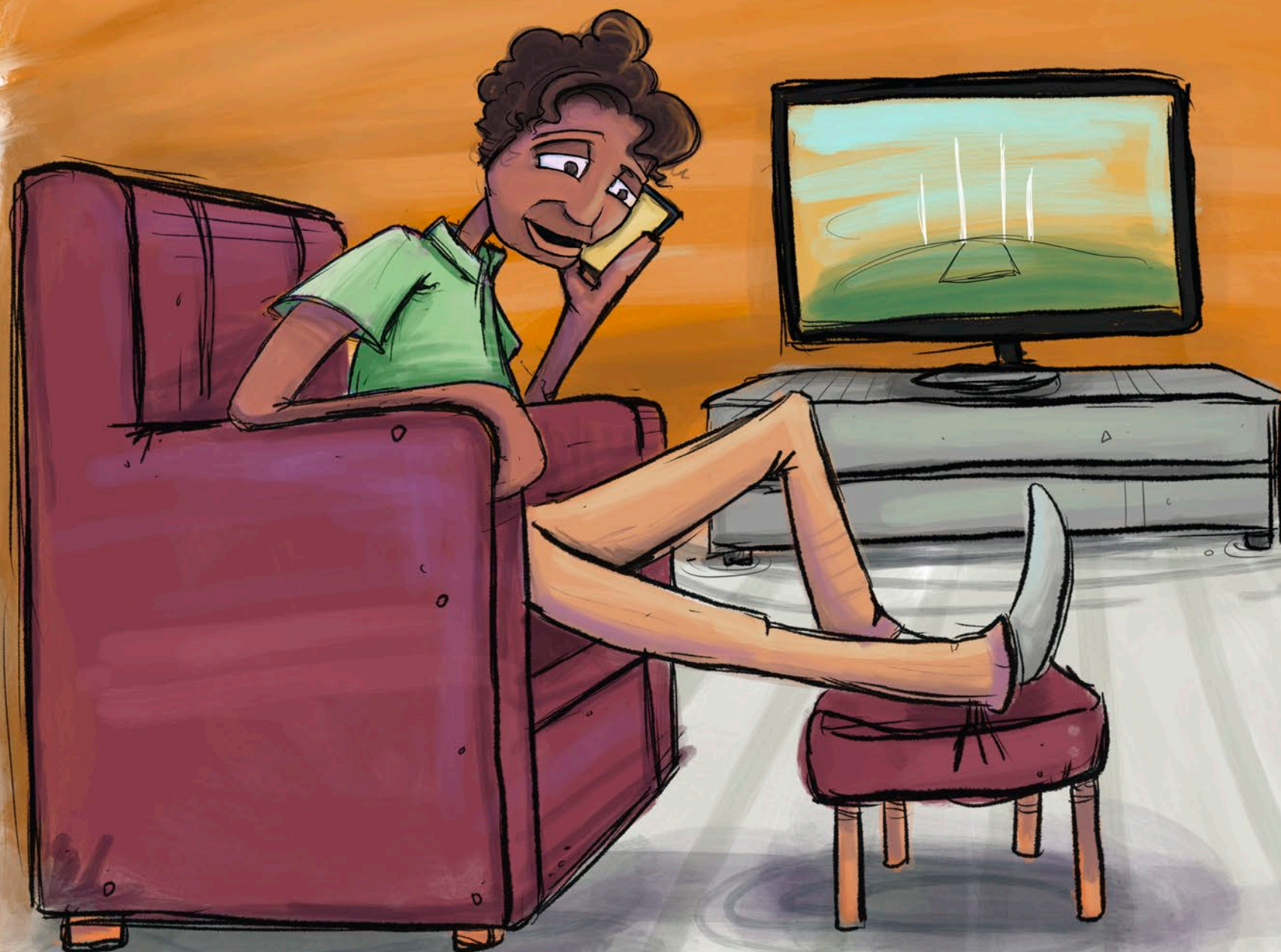
"Where do I start? You know what Uncle's like. Firstly, he said he's sick of being at the aged care place. He's worried about spending the rest of his days in hospital. He really wants to go back to Country and spend time there while he is still good and well enough and he wants to pass away there.

He wants to be where he can get bush tucker, be part of ceremony, pass on stories and secret business and be around all the mob. The doctor said the palliative care team could help us make this happen, and show all the family how to care for him on Country."





"What else did he say?"



"He was really worried about talking to family about this, about his illness, about passing away and what he wants to happen, what he wants everyone in the family to do, and he kept saying he didn't want all the mob fighting over things.

The doctor was good. He mentioned that the Aboriginal health worker could help us organise a family meeting and everyone can hear Uncle's wishes so that we all understand and agree to what Uncle wants. He even said that if people are too far away, palliative care can organise a video connection so family can still be a part of the meeting.

Uncle said he was a little bit sick of medical mob telling him what to do; he wants to do what he wants, especially now that the medical mob can't help him get better. The doctor explained to him that that's what palliative care is all about: they will listen to all his wishes and choices and demands (has a chuckle) and at the end of the day they will try their best to do what he wants.

I could see he was real happy to hear this. He's had a lot of his rights and choices taken away during his life. The doctor even explained to him that before he gets too crook, he could choose someone in the family to speak and make decisions on his behalf in case he can't yarn anymore when he gets real crook."



"Was he worried about anything else?"

"Yeah, he was a bit scared about being out on Country with the pain he is feeling. The doctor explained to him that with help from family and the medical service, the palliative care mob could teach us all how to care for him and help with his medicines to make sure he's not in any pain."

"That's good to hear."





"The last thing he was worried about is all of us stressing for him and trying to organise everything. The Aboriginal health worker was good too, she let me know that palliative care can help us to get the carer payments if we need to or help Uncle access his superannuation to help out now or to pay for Sorry Business after, that might help us mob stay strong and heal better by not worrying about all the money stuff for the funeral. She said they can support us with any cultural business by making sure Uncle is right for equipment when he wants to go out on Country. I'm still worried for Uncle but I feel bit better knowing the palliative care mob can help with all those things."

"That's good news. Well, what does he want to do from here?"

"The doctor's organised a meeting with that mob tomorrow."

"That's good and I'm glad Uncle feels good about it all."

"Thanks for yarning with me, you've really helped Uncle and the rest of the family. Uncle's definitely more relaxed now, he even cracked one of his gammon jokes this morning!"





## What is Palliative Care?

Palliative care is the treatment, care and support for those living with a life limiting illness. A life-limiting illness is an illness that can not be cured and that people are likely to pass away from. Palliative care is for people of any age including children, young people, adults and Elders. The aim of palliative care is to support the sick person to have good quality of life until they return to Spirit. Palliative care can also support the sick person's family.

Palliative care can include:

- managing physical symptoms such as pain
- emotional, spiritual and psychological support
- social care, including help with things like washing, dressing or eating
  - help for families to come together and yarn about sensitive issues
    - support for cultural business
    - counselling and grief support, and
    - referrals to respite care services.

Palliative care is not the same as end-of-life care. The sick person can receive palliative care at any stage of their illness and doesn't always mean they will pass away soon. People can receive palliative care for years and can also continue treatments for their illnesses while they are having palliative care.

End-of-life care is the care given to the sick person and their family towards the end of their life. End-of-life care is an important part of palliative care. End-of-life care often involves bringing together a range of health professionals to help those who are very close to returning to Spirit to live out their life as comfortably as possible.

Yarn with your doctor or local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health service to get more information on palliative and end-of-life care for someone you know with a life limiting illness.





Sharing the story of one family's journey of understanding and accessing palliative care, this resource aims to inform community on the services and supports available for those on their returning to Spirit journey.

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For more information visit  
[www.gwandalanpalliativecare.com.au](http://www.gwandalanpalliativecare.com.au)

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