

What is Palliative Care?



Palliative care is specialized health care for individuals diagnosed with a serious illness to manage the pain, symptoms and stress of living with a serious illness. A Palliative Care clinician or a team of care providers, offer an “extra layer of support” in addition to your regular medical care. They can provide emotional and spiritual support for you and your family. Palliative care improves your quality of life and makes every day the best it can be.

1. Who can get Palliative Care?

Any individual diagnosed with a serious illness seeking relief from the symptoms, pain and stress of their illness, or a family member, can ask their doctors and care providers for palliative care. Serious illness can occur at any age, and may include cancer, respiratory diseases, heart disease, Alzheimer’s disease, HIV/AIDS, kidney or liver failure, multiple sclerosis, and more.

2. How does Palliative Care work?

Every person diagnosed with a serious illness can experience the pain and symptoms of their disease quite differently. A palliative care clinician or a team of care specialists, which may include nurses, doctors, social workers, pharmacists and clergy, work together with the patient’s regular care team to find the source of the problem. The clinician or team talk with the patient about the best possible treatments options to help relieve or control pain, and to improve symptoms such as shortness of breath, nausea, loss of appetite, fatigue, trouble sleeping, and to manage stress, anxiety and depression. The team coordinates your care all through your illness.

3. When can I ask my health care team for Palliative Care?

Anytime. You can ask your care providers for palliative care when first diagnosed and throughout the changing phases of a serious illness. Palliative Care helps patients undergoing aggressive treatments when working towards a cure or remission of an illness. If serious illness is not or no longer curative, palliative care can be supportive to help control the progression of the illness, to manage symptoms that may change over time, and to improve comfort care and quality of life.

4. Where can I find it and how do I pay for it?

Most adults can receive palliative care where they live or receive care. However, palliative care can vary widely as to which care providers in your community offer it, what services they provide, and how to pay for it. Many insurance plans cover all or part of palliative care. Ask your primary care doctor or clinician for a palliative care referral that aligns with your illness and your care goals.

5. What’s the difference between Palliative Care and Hospice Care?

Palliative care is for individuals at any age and at any phase of health living with a serious illness. Hospice care is a benefit you receive from Medicare when your doctor determines your life expectancy is 6 months or less. Often people receiving hospice care also receive palliative care services. At this phase, palliative care can offer comfort care and improve the quality of everyday life, and for some, increase life expectancy.

6. How do I know if Palliative Care is right for me?

Talk with your doctors and care providers to learn how an “added layer of services and support” can help you or a loved one on a serious illness journey. [Read more about Palliative Care at www.honoringchoicesmass.com.](http://www.honoringchoicesmass.com)

Palliative Care Discussion Guide

Palliative Care: 5 Things to Talk About With Your Care Providers

To make a plan for the best possible care.

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| INFORMATION TO MAKE CHOICES | 1. I'd like to understand more about my health or illness and treatment options: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is palliative care? How does it fit into my regular care? • Here's what troubles me most: what relief can I expect with palliative care? |
| MY GOALS | 2. I want to discuss my goals and explore the care I want and do not want: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Here's what is most important to me; here's what worries or concerns me. • Here's what I'm able to do now; here's what I'm hoping for. • Given my priorities, goals and choices, what palliative services may be best? |
| MY PLAN | 3. Let's discuss my care plan and writing down my choices in planning documents: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who's on my palliative care team? What's the plan for getting me to my goals? • I have a Health Care Proxy; or, I do not have a Health Care Proxy — can you help? • Let's discuss my choices about life-sustaining treatments and complete a MOLST form. |
| KNOW MY CHOICES | 4. I'd like to make sure you know my choices and that my medical record is up-to-date: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Who will coordinate my care and communicate updates/changes with me and my family? • I'd like to revise/add to my planning documents and review my medical record. |
| HONOR MY CHOICES | 5. I'd like to make sure my care providers honor my choices all through my life: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In an emergency, if I can't speak with you, how will I know my choices will be followed? |

5 Things to Talk About with Your Care Providers is a basic discussion guide to help you start a planning discussion to promote lifelong wellness and receive person-centered care. Start with one or more questions that make sense to you, and write down your own questions below to bring to your next appointment.
