

Introduction to Palliative and Hospice Care

HEIDI ROLFS, B.A., R.N., O.C.N.

This information will explain the similarities and differences between palliative and hospice care.

Both palliative and hospice care focus on the physical, social, cultural, emotional and spiritual needs of people who are terminally ill and their caregivers. Both programs use a team of professionals who work together to provide services according to a specific plan of care. The shared goal for both palliative and hospice care is to achieve a good quality of life while living with a terminal illness.

Although palliative and hospice care are similar in many ways, there are some important differences to know about to fully understand your care options:

Hospice Care

- ✓ The focus is on relieving pain and other symptoms of the illness, usually during the last expected 6 months of life.
- ✓ A medical doctor certifies that the individual has a life expectancy of 6 months or less, if the illness takes its usual course.
- ✓ Services are available to those for whom a cure is not possible and who choose to focus on comfort and improved quality of life. The focus is on *care*, not cure nor extending life.
- ✓ Care is available in a hospital, hospice center, and some types of nursing homes and care facilities, but most often it takes place in the patient's home.
- ✓ Medicare, Medicaid, and, to some extent or for a limited time, most private insurance plans and HMO's pay for hospice services.

Palliative Care

- ✓ Services are available earlier in the course of a persistent or life threatening illness, not only during the last 6 months of life.
- ✓ A doctor does not need to certify life expectancy.
- ✓ Palliative care can be given at the same time as treatments to cure illness, increase life expectancy or improve daily functioning.
- ✓ The care itself focuses on comfort, *as well as* maintaining or improving daily functioning during the course of an illness.
- ✓ Care may occur in a hospital, nursing home, care facility, or at home.
- ✓ Insurance plans, HMO's, Medicare and Medicaid pay for palliative care.

Talk to your Palliative Care Specialist or Hospice Nurse if you need further information about these services.

The information and recommendations appearing on this page are appropriate in most instances, but are not a substitute for medical diagnosis. For specific information concerning your personal situation or medical condition, JPM suggests that you consult your physician. This page may be photocopied noncommercially by physicians and other health care professionals to share with patients. Any other print or online reproduction is subject to approval by the publisher: Mary Ann Liebert, Inc. To purchase bulk reprints, call 914-834-3100 ext. 609.