

What is Palliative Care?

Palliative care refers to the care of a person who is dying of a disease that is not curable. The focus of palliative care is to provide physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual support to an individual in their final stages of life. It involves easing the person's pain and alleviating symptoms; it is not meant to cure the disease nor does it hasten the person's death. Further, palliative care is not exclusive for people dying of cancer, but can be provided to people dying of any terminal disease. The goal is to ensure that any person, regardless of their age or stage of illness, has the best quality of life while dying. Support and comfort is also provided to family, both throughout the dying process as well as during bereavement. This helps the family members confront their grief, make decisions, and adapt to necessary changes.

Palliative care is provided by an interdisciplinary team of professional whose central focus is the person who is dying as well as their family.

- **Family doctors** work closely with the palliative staff as well as the family to ensure that the individual is receiving the best care possible; this involves making visits to the hospital, hospice or home.
- **Palliative consultants** include doctors and nurses that are specialized in palliative care, and who help other medical staff in caring for the dying individual. They also coordinate the admission of the individual to hospice or hospital.
- **Physiotherapists** aid the individual in their mobility (via wheelchair, walker or in the bed). They also help with exercises, massages, and positioning in order to reduce pain or discomfort.
- **Pastoral care** counselors respect all faiths and are available to provide spiritual support. They help both the dying individual and family search for meanings, celebrating life while enduring pain and reflecting on faith, prayers and rituals.
- **Social workers** help with the personal and social issues surrounding the illness and death. This includes facilitating meetings with the family to discuss their feelings of grief, financial plans and economic issues, as well as ways to cope and take care of themselves after the death. They also help make arrangements for the individual's care at home, hospice or hospital.
- **Occupational therapists (OT)** help plan activities to provide the dying person with a sense of independence, as well as improve their physical and emotional state. The OT plans things for the person and their family to do together, as well as relaxation exercises.
- **Respiratory therapists** help the person with their breathing problems by providing instruction on how to use necessary equipment and medication.

The following is a summary of the different places where palliative care can be provided:

- **Home care:**

This is intended for individuals that want to be cared for in their homes, and may even want to die at home. It includes bathing, washing, providing necessary supplies, managing pain and symptoms, as well as emotional support. It also allows for those family members or friends that are caring for the person to take a break.

- **Hospital**

Tertiary palliative care unit: This is a unit of the hospital for individuals with severe pain and symptoms that are difficult to manage. The person is referred to this unit either by their family doctor or a palliative care consultant. Once the person's condition has improved or stabilized, the family doctor is notified. The person can then be moved home (with the option to continue with palliative home care) or to a hospice.

- **Hospice:**

Hospices are continuing care facilities. They are intended for palliative individuals that do not want to stay at home, or do not have the resources or support to be cared for in the home. The palliative staff as well as the family doctor work closely to provide the necessary care. These individuals do not have severe symptoms or pain and do not need to be in a hospital. The staff at the hospice manages symptoms and provides comfort for the person.

REFERENCES:

- www.palliative.org General Public- Palliative Care
- *RPCP Training Manual for Volunteers in Palliative Care: Session 1*

