

WHAT IS PALLIATIVE CARE?

Sometimes referred to as “comfort care,” palliative care is a specialized approach to the treatment of patients with a serious or life-threatening illness. The goal of palliative care is to provide relief from the symptoms, pain and stress of serious illness. It is also designed to improve the quality of life of both the patient and the patient’s family.

WHO PROVIDES PALLIATIVE CARE?

Palliative care is provided by a team of specialists who are trained in assisting patients and their families through what can be the most difficult time in their lives. Members of the team typically include physicians, nurse practitioners, social workers, and spiritual care coordinators. Some palliative care teams have physical and speech therapists, pharmacists, dieticians and trained volunteers.

IS PALLIATIVE CARE THE SAME AS HOSPICE?

No. Palliative care is different from hospice in two main ways:

- Patients can continue to receive aggressive and curative kinds of treatment like chemotherapy, radiation, dialysis and surgery while receiving palliative care
- In order to receive palliative care, patients do not need a physician to certify that they have a terminal diagnosis and a life-expectancy of six-months or less

WHO IS APPROPRIATE FOR PALLIATIVE CARE?

Palliative care is for anyone with a serious or life-threatening illness. Serious illnesses may include cancer, dementia, heart and lung disease like CHF and COPD, End Stage Renal Disease, liver disease, ALS, HIV/AIDS and others. Palliative care can be provided to patients of any age, at any stage of their illness.

WHERE DO PATIENTS RECEIVE PALLIATIVE CARE?

Palliative care can be received in any setting. Many patients begin receiving palliative care while in the hospital. Others receive palliative care in their home, in a community clinic, in a cancer center, while in rehab or in a skilled nursing facility.

WILL MY INSURANCE COMPANY COVER PALLIATIVE CARE?

Most insurers and health care plans will cover the medical portions -physician and nurse services- of palliative care. Some insurers may even cover social work. Unlike the comprehensive hospice benefit, there is no comprehensive palliative care benefit. Your palliative care provider will help you answer this question.

For specific information in your area, consult your doctor or call your local hospital or hospice. Many hospices now offer palliative care programs.

To learn more go to momentsoflife.org/palliativecare.

