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Issues

Information and ideas for those
serving seniors.

on Aging

PALLIATIVE CARE

Palliative care has long been associated with and is an integral part of hospice care which is care of those who are dying; however palliative care has a much broader reach to those who are suffering whether they are dying or not. Palliative or supportive care can begin at any time one is facing illness and does not require that a person is receiving hospice care. The goal of palliative care is to prevent and relieve suffering and to support the best possible quality of life for patients and their families, regardless of the stage of the disease or the need for other therapies.⁽¹⁾ Palliative care addresses not only physical symptoms but emotional, spiritual, family and social needs. Palliative care for serious and / or chronic illnesses is available to those of all ages from newborns and children to the elderly in their final years.

PALLIATIVE CARE PROVIDES HOLISTIC CARE

Addressing the 'whole' person and the needs each individual has is essential to effective care. Palliative care seeks to address all needs a person has when they are facing serious illness. Concepts like cultural values, personal goals, dignity and self-esteem are highly regarded when planning palliative care.

Many chronic or serious illnesses have long-term effects and complications that make daily life uncomfortable or difficult. Palliative care is beneficial to people of all ages at all stages of managing an illness or serious condition. Many 'common' health conditions become chronic and produce symptoms that worsen over time including coronary artery disease (CAD) and congestive heart failure (CHF); chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) and emphysema; kidney disease, liver disease and others. Palliative care is also beneficial

to those with illnesses that have an expected progressive decline such as amyotrophic lateral sclerosis (ALS), Huntington's chorea, Parkinson's disease or Alzheimer's disease.

Palliative Care may also be recommended for those who are living with complex medical conditions such as traumatic brain injury (TBI), stroke or metastatic cancer to aid in managing problematic symptoms, relieving pain and promoting comfort. Palliative Care is a team approach to managing symptoms that make a person's day to day life distressing, uncomfortable and challenging. Palliative care can also be used to provide symptom management for conditions caused by the treatment of serious illness or complex medical conditions. Whether shortness of breath related to emphysema, fatigue related to cancer treatment or swelling that accompanies congestive heart failure, palliative care offers treatment and options to minimize symptoms and enhance daily living.

INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORTIVE CARE

Palliative care is individualized care that meets the needs of each person based upon what symptoms they are experiencing, what their personal goals

and preferences are and what their individual condition requires for relief. A person who is being provided palliative care is able to continue treatments and curative approaches to their condition. Palliative care may begin at the time of diagnosis or it may be added further down the road when symptoms arise. A person receiving palliative care may require help managing a single issue or a wide variety of symptoms and challenges related to their condition. Palliative care can be provided to anyone of any age and for any symptoms that interfere with or negatively affect daily living and comfort. Common symptoms palliative care may address include:

- nausea , vomiting, poor appetite and weight loss
- shortness of breath, edema, weight gain
- pain, discomfort, difficult mobility
- stress, fatigue, depression, anxiety
- difficulty sleeping or feeling lethargic and too sleepy
- constipation or diarrhea
- and many others

Continued....

PALLIATIVE CARE CAN:

- Maximize comfort and promote quality of life
- Improve coping by enhancing comfort, managing symptoms, promoting better rest and providing opportunities for improved nutrition
- Aide family dynamics while minimizing stress, answering questions, promoting communication, and facilitating healing of relationship
- Assist and guide with navigating complex medical systems, identifying needs, seeking and obtaining resources
- Reduce anxiety, fear and depression by minimizing the feeling that one doesn't know what to do, providing support and reassurance, assist in obtaining resources when the illness and related treatments are overwhelming

PROVIDERS OF PALLIATIVE CARE

A person receiving palliative care does not have to give up or change their personal physician. They can work with their own physician and they are provided opportunity to benefit from the experience and expertise of an entire team including but not limited to physicians, nurses, social workers, dietitians, complimentary therapy practitioners, physical, occupational and respiratory therapists, pharmacists and many more. Caring for the whole person and their support circle is essential to achieving therapeutic effects and the most benefit from palliative care approaches. Each individual and their specific needs and values guides which team members are called upon and which resources and interventions are best for that person.

VITAL CONVERSATIONS

It is essential that anyone being treated for a serious illness or condition understand there are resources available to support a person through the many possible challenges associated with complex medical conditions. Often times people believe they have all of the information they need to know about their situation because they don't know what they don't know and therefore they may miss the opportunity for: greater control of symptoms; supportive care for the other aspects of life affected by illness or chronic health problems; and attaining available resources that can enhance quality of life and minimize challenges.

FINDING A PALLIATIVE CARE TEAM

Most often the best way to initiate considering palliative care is to speak with the primary care physician. At times the physician may be able to initiate palliative measures depending upon the condition and symptoms needing care. When symptoms and needs are beyond what the primary care physician can provide a referral to a palliative care team is made. This team may be chosen based upon a number of factors including:

- health insurance coverage
- hospitals, clinics and networks affiliated with the primary care provider
- the diagnosis or condition needing care
- the type of services desired (i.e. complimentary therapies...)

ASK A DOCTOR TO:

- explain what treatment options are available
- discuss what kind of challenges the treatment(s) might cause
- outline what happens if a particular treatment regime is not chosen or used
- describe what the future looks like with this condition
- provide information on how other aspects of one's life may be impacted
- detail how the doctor will be involved in the care long-term

BE SURE TO LET THE DOCTOR KNOW:

- what "quality of life" means to you
- who, where and how available are supportive people in your life
- what preferences and beliefs you have that may pertain to treatment options
- under what circumstances you would want to consider ending treatment
- how you feel about aggressive medical interventions like dialysis, heroic measures like CPR, the use of life-sustaining treatments like ventilators and feeding tubes

WHEN DOES PALLIATIVE CARE END

Palliative care ends when a person has completion of treatment for an illness or disease and no longer needs care (i.e. cancer is in remission and chemotherapy ends), when their symptoms improve and they no longer need assistance in achieving relief (i.e. recovery from a traumatic or surgical event is complete) or when their condition deteriorates and consideration of hospice care in conjunction with current palliative measures is initiated to provide ongoing comfort and support through the end of life process.

(1) <http://www.nhpco.org/history-hospice-care>

How Matrix Can Help

- Matrix RN Care Managers are knowledgeable about serious and chronic illnesses and long-term disease management. Matrix RN Care Managers have extensive knowledge of palliative and supportive care measures.
- Matrix RN Care Managers and home caregivers understand the special needs of elders, those with complex medical needs, those with dementia of all levels, adults with disabilities and those who are receiving supportive or end of life care and they receive ongoing education, coaching and support to meet the individual needs of every client.
- Matrix assures that a licensed RN develops a Plan of Care in conjunction with the client and family and when Matrix Home Health Care Services are provided the RN Care Manager supervises the home caregivers closely to ensure that Home Care services are provided skillfully, respectfully, and safely.

For more information about Matrix Home Health Care Specialists Care Management or Home Health Care Services or for a complimentary consultation, call 952.525.0505 or 800.560.0961