Palliative Care & Counseling Patients and Families at the End of Life

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www.med.stanford.edu/palliative-care
Roadmap

- What is palliative care?
- How is palliative care different from other medical teams?
- Counseling patients and families at the end of life
What is Palliative Care?

- What comes to mind when you hear the term palliative care?
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- What comes to mind when you hear the term palliative care?
How is Palliative Care Different?

- Palliative care sees the person beyond the disease.
  - “A person living with cancer” vs. “cancer patient”
How is Palliative Care Different?

- A Holistic Approach

*Derived from World Health Organization definition of palliative care, 1998*
Defining Palliative Care

▪ Palliative care is specialized health care for people living with a serious illness.

▪ This type of care is focused on providing relief from the symptoms and stress of the illness.

▪ The goal is to improve quality of life for both the patient and the family.

Center to Advance Palliative Care (CAPC), 2019
Defining Palliative Care

- Provided by a specially-trained team, palliative care specialists work together with a patient’s other doctors to provide an essential layer of support.

- Palliative care is based on the needs of the patient, not on the prognosis. It is appropriate at any age and at any point in a serious illness and can be delivered with curative treatment.
The department brought in a business consultant who recommended a 20% cut in compassion to save money. So in future when you come in you’ll have to talk to yourself!
Spiritual Care Providers and/or Volunteers

- They provide compassionate care and companionship.
- They can be present with patients and/or or families as important decisions are made.
- They are trained to create safe environments in which exploration of concerns and expression of feelings can be shared without judgment.
- Fear, anxiety, despair and even physical pain diminish when one feels heard and accepted in the process of coming to terms or coping with serious illness.
How is Palliative Care Different?

Doctor & Nurse
- Prescribes medication
- Helps with medical decisions
- Coordinates with other doctors

Social Worker
- Emotional Support
- Caregiver support
- Medical equipment
- Financial concerns

Chaplain
- Spiritual support
- Existential distress
- Prayers and blessings
Palliative Care vs. Hospice vs. Home Health

- **Palliative Care / Hospice / Home Health**
  - Interdisciplinary team care

- **Palliative Care / Hospice**
  - Focus on QoL, holistic approach

- **Palliative Care / Home Health**
  - Ok to be getting disease-directed treatments

- **Hospice / Home Health**
  - Home-based care
End-Of-Life Care

- Patient death can be emotionally and psychologically stressful not only for families, caregivers and friends, but also for clinicians and providers of the interdisciplinary team (including volunteers).
Understanding & Supporting

- Being present provides reassurance not dying alone
- Being present is the most important thing.
- Set aside personal agenda and assumptions.
- Provides a dignified death.
Things You Can Do

- Play soothing music/reading sacred texts as per patient’s spiritual, religious and cultural backgrounds
- Hold hands if appropriate
- Encourage sharing life stories
- Give permission to die/loved ones
- Allow/facilitate the expression of grief (tears, silence, anger, frustration)
Spiritual and Cultural Rituals

- Blessings/Anointing or Last Rites/Holy Communion
- Prayers
- Meditations
- Mindfulness
- Chanting or recitation
- Rosaries

- Saying goodbye
- Baptism
- Confession
- Sage
Words That Work (or at least worth a try)

- “There is no right or wrong way to approach this.”
- “I’m not sure. There is still mystery in medicine and in life.”
- “Being here and being present is helpful.”
- “Your voice and presence can bring a comfort that medicines cannot.”
- “How are you holding up? Have you been able to take a break or anytime for yourself?”
- “This is really hard. I’m sorry your family is going through this.”
- “Please forgive me.” “I forgive you.” “Thank you.” “I love you.” (Byock)
- Ask your nurse-case manager to review normal signs at EOL w/ families
How Do I Get Palliative Care at Stanford?

- You can refer yourself
  - Call our clinic at (650) 724-0385
  - Website: https://stanfordhealthcare.org/medical-clinics/palliative-care.html

- You can ask your doctor to place a referral

- Locations in Palo Alto and South Bay
  - TeleHealth also available!

- Please take a brochure and a business card
Thank you!

Please complete our survey to help us improve our presentations!

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