

# THINGS YOU SHOULD KNOW ABOUT PALLIATIVE CARE

In the Clinic  
Annals of Internal Medicine

## What does "palliative" mean? What is palliative care?

Palliative means "cloaking or protecting." Often, when you or a loved one is experiencing serious illness, focusing on relief from uncontrolled symptoms (like pain, shortness of breath, or tiredness) is a major goal. Feeling supported, having more control over your care, and understanding what to expect in the future are main concerns. Palliative care is a medical specialty that works with your current doctors (such as internists, cardiologists, or oncologists) to assist in these areas, while always respecting what is most important to you.

## What do palliative care specialists do?

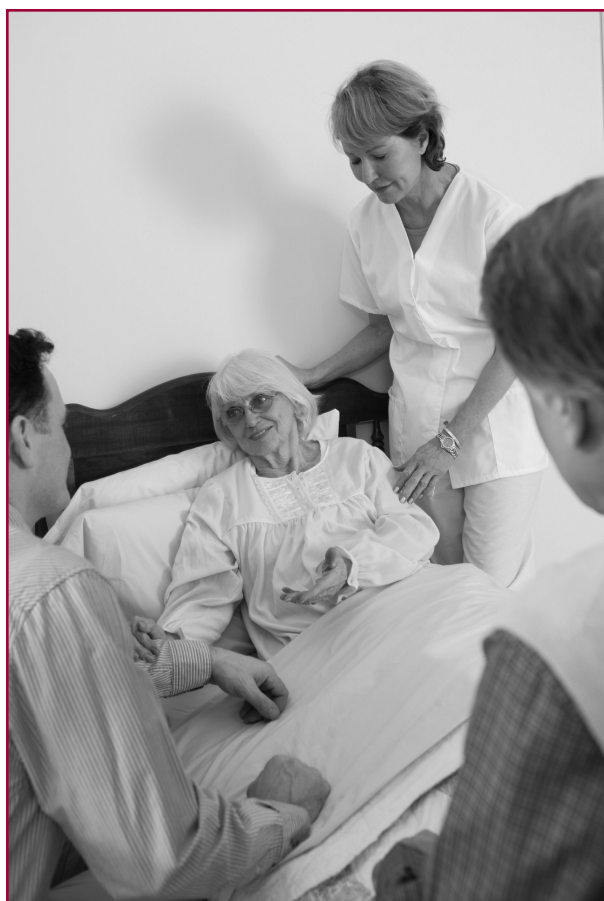
Palliative care experts—including physicians, nurse practitioners, and physician assistants—work with a larger team of nurses, pharmacists, social workers, chaplains, discharge planners, physical therapists, and others to put together a plan that helps you to feel better, to improve your quality of life, and support your family as they support you. They work closely with you and your caregivers to help treat your symptoms, make sure you have the information you want, anticipate and plan for future needs, and ensure that your other providers are aware of your goals, wishes, and needs.

## Is palliative care the same as hospice?

No. Hospice requires that a patient has a disease that would be expected to take his or her life in 6 months or less if it progresses in the usual way. Palliative care does not have this type of limitation. All patients with a serious illness who have symptoms and questions about care planning, the future, effects of illness on loved ones, and communication or just want to feel better are eligible for palliative care. Your doctor may believe that seeing a palliative care professional, alongside your other doctors, may be helpful.

## Situations When Palliative Care May Help

- Repeated emergency department visits or hospitalizations for a chronic disease.
- Feeling like you don't have all the information you need.
- Worrying about the future.
- Being concerned about the effects of your illness on your loved ones.
- When your medications aren't helping your pain, tiredness, shortness of breath, or other symptoms.
- When you are worried about getting the right treatment if your disease suddenly gets worse.



## For More Information

# ACP

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[www.getpalliativecare.org](http://www.getpalliativecare.org)

A comprehensive resource for determining whether you or a loved one needs palliative care; includes a list of Web sites of organizations that offer support for people with serious illness.