

What is Palliative Care?



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Palliative Care is care and support provided to people who have a progressive, life-limiting illness. A life-limiting illness is an illness that cannot be cured. There are many life-limiting illnesses such as cancer, motor neurone disease, end-stage heart failure, end-stage lung or kidney disease and dementia.

The focus is on improving the quality of life of patients, their families, and carers by addressing their many needs; physical (including treatment assessment and management of pain and other symptoms), emotional, social, cultural, and spiritual needs.

What does Palliative Care offer?

The care offered may include: Medical treatment such as relief of pain and other symptoms e.g. vomiting, shortness of breath; access to resources such as equipment needed to aid care at home; nursing care, links to other services such as home help and financial support; counselling and grief support; support for people to meet cultural obligations and referrals to respite care services.

Who is eligible for Palliative Care?

Palliative care is for people of any age who have been diagnosed with a life-limiting illness that cannot be cured. This includes children and young people, adults, and older persons.

When to start palliative care depends on the stage of your illness. You may need to start palliative care not long after getting your diagnosis. This can often help you and your family deal with your diagnosis. Or you may not need it until your illness progresses. You can also have other treatments by different doctors even when you are having palliative care.

Who provides Palliative Care?

Many people think that palliative care is only about care that is provided in the last days of life (terminal phase), but that is a myth. Palliative care can be provided by several different health professionals, depending on the needs of the person.

For those people with a life-limiting illness and relatively uncomplicated illness journey, care is most appropriately delivered by the generalist palliative care team – GP, other medical specialists, community nurses, allied health professionals. The goal is to improve the person's level of comfort and function, and to address their physical, psychological, spiritual & social needs. A small number of people experience more complex problems as their condition advances. These people may be referred to a specialist palliative care service where a team of specialist professionals will work together to address these concerns.

Where is Palliative Care provided?

There are a range of settings where Palliative Care can be provided – home, residential aged care, hospital outpatient clinics, hospitals, and specialist Palliative care units located in metropolitan, rural, and remote areas.