

Palliative Care

Some serious chronic medical illnesses, such as certain cancers or AIDS, cause significant suffering and impair quality of life. **Palliative care** is therapy that focuses on decreasing pain and suffering by providing patients with medication for relief of their symptoms and with comfort and support. Palliative care uses a team approach that involves the treating doctor, the family, and other health care professionals and social services. **Hospice care**, which involves helping ill individuals and their families during the last period of life, is often an important part of palliative care.

The February 20, 2002, issue of *JAMA* contains an article about palliative care services in hospitals.

PALLIATIVE CARE PATIENT SUPPORT SERVICES

- **Pain management** is vital for comfort and to reduce patients' distress. Health care professionals and families can work together to identify the sources of pain and relieve them with drugs and other therapies.
- **Symptom management** involves treating symptoms other than pain such as nausea, weakness, bowel and bladder problems, mental confusion, fatigue, and difficulty breathing.
- **Emotional and spiritual support** is vital for both the patient and family in dealing with the stresses of critical illness and, when appropriate, death.
- Other support may involve modifying the patient's environment according to his or her wishes and preferences, such as playing music, providing low lighting, and reading to the patient.



PALLIATIVE CARE CAREGIVER SUPPORT SERVICES

- Health care professionals can educate families about the patient's problems and provide advice on care such as giving medication and recognizing symptoms that require immediate medical attention.
- Home support services may provide help with transportation, shopping, and preparing meals.
- **Respite care** provides relief and time off to the caregiver.
- Families may need help with developing a plan to manage the financial strains of caregiving, such as loss of income and added expenses.
- Creating a support network of people such as other family members, friends, and clergy can be very helpful.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Hospice Foundation of America
800/854-3402
www.hospicefoundation.org
- Family Caregiver Alliance
800/445-8106
www.caregiver.org

INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Index on JAMA's Web site at www.jama.com. A Patient Page on hospice care was published in the February 21, 2001, issue, one on end-of-life care in the November 15, 2000, issue, one on the stresses of being a caregiver in the December 15, 1999, issue, and one on managing pain in the April 5, 2000, issue.

Sources: *Americans for Better Care of the Dying*, Beth Israel Medical Center, Growth House, Inc., Hospice Education Institute, Hospice Patients Alliance, National Hospice Foundation, World Health Organization

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