Palliative Care: Improving the Quality of Life for Caregivers and Veterans with Chronic Illness Handout

Chronic illness has the capacity to wear at the threads that hold a quality life together, for both the Veteran and caregiver. One of the primary guiding principles of Palliative care is enhancing the quality of life for those that suffer from chronic illness, and supporting and engaging the family and caregivers that care for them.

What is Palliative Care?

- Palliative Care is specialized medical care for those suffering from chronic, serious, or life limiting illness, at any age, or stage of illness.
- Palliative care is provided by a team of specialists, which can include a doctor, nurse, social worker, chaplain and other medical professionals who provide consultation, or work in conjunction with your current medical providers.
- Palliative Care may be considered when you have been diagnosed with a serious or chronic illness for example cancer, heart, lung disease, dementia, or kidney failure.
- Palliative Care is best started early to enhance quality of life throughout the illness.
- Patients receiving palliative care are still actively receiving treatment meant to cure the illness

What is the goal of Palliative?

- Palliative Care is patient centered, meaning they support the patient and their unique values, preferences, and needs with the goal of improving the quality of life for the individual
- Assists patients in finding relief; from pain, debilitating symptoms, and the emotional distress caused by serious illness and its treatment.
- Recognizes and supports the significant role of the patients family and caregivers and includes them in planning
- Provides support in coordinating and navigating the healthcare system and providers of your care
- To provide clear information to help guide you in making informed decisions about your healthcare. This includes understanding life-sustaining treatments,
and developing an Advance Directive and Health Care Proxy that supports your wishes and values.

Four Questions Identified by Dr. Susan Block that guide discussion with patients with chronic illness

- What is your understanding of your condition or prognosis?
- What are your fears of worries about what lies ahead?
- What goals do you have, as your time gets short? How do you want to spend your time?
- What are you willing to trade off or sacrifice, how much suffering are you willing to go through, for the sake of having more time?

Your Conversation Starter Kit - The conversation project is dedicated to helping people talk about their wishes for end of life care. This link will take you to the conversation project starter kits, to assist you in these difficult conversations.

http://theconversationproject.org/starter-kits/

Advance Directives - Every adult over the age of 18 should have taken some time to consider the difficult questions and planning that occurs in an Advanced Directive, but it is especially critical if you have been diagnosed with a chronic disease. Advance directives provide documented directions for healthcare and family that supports your wishes and identifies a person that can advocate for your wishes if you are unable to yourself. These are available from your VA providers or for non-Veterans, on line at www.caringinfo.org or by following the link provided

http://www.caringinfo.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=1

The VA Caregiver Support Line is available as a support to you. Social workers are available Monday through Friday 8am to 8pm ET to provide emotional support, a listening ear, and resources and information, to assist you in your caregiving journey. Don’t hesitate to reach out to us for support at 1-855-260-3274

VA Caregiver Support Line 1-855-260-3274