



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

Chronic illness can wear at the threads that hold a quality life together. Improving the quality of life is the goal of Palliative care. They specialize in managing the symptoms and the pain of these illnesses. These providers also support the family and those that care for the person who is ill. They help them all cope with the challenges they face.

What is Palliative Care?

- Specialized medical care for those suffering from chronic, serious, or life limiting illness, at any age, or stage of illness
- It is provided by a team of specialists, which can include a doctor, nurse, social worker, chaplain and other professionals that work with your current medical providers
- Can be considered when you have been diagnosed with a serious or chronic illness for example cancer, heart, lung disease, dementia, or kidney failure
- It is best started early to improve the 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 Care?

- It is patient centered, meaning they support the patient and their individual values, preferences, and needs with the goal of improving the quality of life
- 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
- Provides 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 and may result from it?
- What are your fears or 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 sacrifice? How much suffering are you willing to go through for the sake of having more time?

Your Conversation Starter Kit- Would you like help to guide a discussion for end of life care? This link will take you to the conversation project guide. These starter kits will help you have these difficult conversations. To learn more, click on this link.

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

Advance Directives- You never know when a health crisis may occur. Every adult should plan ahead. What if a crisis occurs and you can't direct your healthcare wishes? It is really critical if you have been diagnosed with a chronic disease. If you can't speak up for yourself, they provide guidance for your care providers about your wishes. It also helps guide your family supports your wishes. You will identify a person that can advocate for you if you can't. These forms are available from your VA providers. For non-Veterans, the forms can be found online. Go to 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**