

# 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 treatments for relief of symptoms along with comfort and support for patients of all ages. 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 September 20, 2006, issue of *JAMA* contains an article about spiritual issues in the care of dying patients. This Patient Page is adapted from one previously published in the March 16, 2005, issue of *JAMA*.

## 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.



## 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.

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## FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Hospice Foundation of America  
[www.hospicefoundation.org](http://www.hospicefoundation.org)
- Family Caregiver Alliance  
[www.caregiver.org](http://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](http://www.jama.com). A Patient Page on hospice care was published in the February 8, 2006, 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, one on managing pain in the April 5, 2000, issue, and one on palliative sedation in the October 12, 2005, 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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