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Palliative care? Hospice care?
By: Advocate Health Care
November 2013

November Is National Hospice Month

When a physician feels that a patient is not benefitting from aggressive care or perhaps is enduring procedures that are only prolonging his/her dying, the doctor may suggest considering palliative or hospice care. Sometimes patients confuse these two options, but they are not the same. For both palliative care and hospice care, the main focus is care. Giving compassionate care to a seriously ill patient and his/her family by easing the patient’s discomfort and supporting the family are very important at this time in a person’s life.

Palliative care focuses on improving overall quality of life for patients and families facing serious illness. The emphasis is on intensive communication, pain and symptom management and coordination of care. Palliative care can be provided at the same time as curative treatment.

Hospice always provides palliative care, but hospice focuses on those terminally ill patients who no longer seek treatments to cure them. Today hospice often takes place in one’s home. Those treating the patient go to the patient’s home, allowing him/her to experience the comfort and familiarity of his/her surroundings. But if there are new advances in treatment or a patient decides to pursue therapy, hospice can be suspended.

Instead of making the time remaining in one’s life seem shorter, hospice can make it more valuable. Without the interruption and discomfort of ongoing medical procedures, there is opportunity for important and healing conversations to be held. There is time to ask forgiveness and to give forgiveness. There is time to say, “Thank you.” There is time to say, “I love you.”


Prayer: Teach me, my God, to offer care and healing to those I love – not just in crises but each and every day. Amen.
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