WHAT IS PALLIATIVE CARE AND HOW DOES IT DIFFER FROM HOSPICE?

While many people believe that palliative care and hospice are the same, they are not. Hospice care is palliative, but palliative care is not hospice.

Palliative care, also sometimes referred to as supportive care, is directed to providing relief from the symptoms and stress of a serious illness, irrespective of the diagnosis or prognosis. The goal is to improve quality of life for both the patient and the family of the patient. The care is not limited to the treatment of physical symptoms and extends to emotional and spiritual issues as well.

Hospice care is typically medical care and service. It is provided to individuals at "end of life" and ordinarily requires the recipient to forego curative treatment. Typically the doctors involved have concluded that their patient has a life expectancy of less than 6 months, assuming the illness follows its natural course.

Palliative care may be appropriate at any stage in a serious illness. This type of care can be provided in conjunction with curative treatment. Palliation, or pain management, can be incorporated at a first diagnosis or in later stages of the disease process. Treatment is based on the needs of the individual. Palliative care is often administered by an interdisciplinary team of professionals and medical specialists who develop an individualized symptom management plan to help accomplish the patient's treatment goals.

Although palliative and hospice care can be beneficial to patients with countless chronic illnesses, both are probably best known for working with patients who have been diagnosed with cancer. The American Cancer Society reports that patients who received hospital-based palliative care experienced benefits like symptom-reduction and lower hospitalization rates. Studies have also shown that people with other chronic illnesses, such as dementia, Parkinson's, heart failure, ALS and lung disease, who receive palliative care, have enjoyed improved quality of life and less severe symptoms.