

Tips for Careworkers: Palliative Care



What it is: Palliative care is an approach that improves the quality of life of people and their family and carers who are facing concerns associated with a life-limiting illness. This means that the person is expected to die in the foreseeable future and before they would have without the condition. This can be true for people at any age including older people.

Why it matters: The number of older people requiring palliative care is increasing in Australia. Careworkers in aged care often spend a lot of time with older people and may learn of their likes, concerns, and experiences. They have an important role in caring for the person and reporting this information to nurses/supervisors.

What I need to know: Dementia, cancer, and advanced heart and lung disease are all examples of life-limiting chronic conditions.

Palliative care provides pain relief and manages symptoms as well as providing spiritual, emotional, and social support. The timing of the start of palliative care depends on the individual and the condition. Care plans may change.

Older people coming to the end of their life without illness can also benefit from a palliative approach to care. Common care issues in people needing palliative care include:

- pain
- dyspnoea (breathing difficulty)
- dysphagia (difficulty with swallowing)
- constipation/incontinence (bowel management)
- anxiety
- dry mouth
- fatigue (tiredness)
- depression.

Note

As a person's needs change, palliative care helps with care planning, declining health, dying, and bereavement.

Note

Some common signs that may indicate things are changing and palliative care needed are:

- less interest in doing things they enjoyed before
- changes in how they act and talk
- less interest in food and eating
- weight loss
- not as physically active as previously
- getting slower and less mobile
- difficulty with toileting
- problems swallowing.

Do

Report what the person enjoys and what gives them satisfaction; recognise what they do well and 'what works'.

Do

Let nursing/supervisory staff know if you notice any signs that a person may need palliative care.

Do

Ask nursing/supervisory staff about SPIC4ALL, a tool to identify when a person's health is declining.

Name:

My reflections:

What are some of the illnesses an older person might have that suggest a need for palliative care?

Why is palliative care important?

What do I do to communicate with older people in my care?

My notes:

See related palliAGED Practice
Tip Sheets:
Advance Care Planning
End-of-Life Care Pathways
Pain Management

For references and the latest version of all Tip Sheets visit
palliaged.com.au/Practice-Centre/For-Careworkers