

NAVIGATING SUPPORTIVE CARE

WHAT IS SUPPORTIVE CARE?

Supportive care or Palliative care is specialized medical care for people living with serious illnesses. The type of care is focused on providing symptoms and stress relief regarding a life limiting diagnosis. The purpose is to improve quality of life for the patient, families and caregivers. It uses a holistic approach that sees the patient by addressing their physical, emotional, social, cultural and spiritual needs.

HOW DO I KNOW IF SUPPORTIVE CARE IS FOR ME?

Supportive care, also known as palliative care, is based on the needs of the patient, rather than the prognosis. It is appropriate at any age and at any stage of a serious illness. It is often initiated for patients dealing with complex symptoms or needing support in multiple areas in order to offer a quality of life that is aligned with the patient's objectives. Research has shown that individuals who receive early access to palliative care may experience improvements in mood, coping, may and even help them live longer.

Your primary care team may be the one to suggest involving the palliative care team. However, it is not uncommon for the patient to make this request.

WHO PROVIDES SUPPORTIVE CARE?

Many professionals may be involved, and services can vary greatly across Canada. Care is often provided by a specially trained team of doctors, nurses, social workers, art therapists, and other providers.

WHAT IS ADVANCE CARE PLANNING?

It is the process of discussing and documenting future health care wishes, values and priorities. Advance care planning allows the family, caregivers and care team to understand the wishes of a person with a life limiting illness, should they become so unwell that they are unable to speak for themselves. It is a way of documenting the medical treatments that are acceptable or not for the individual and may include preferences about non-medical care and lifestyle decisions.

HOW DOES PALLIATIVE CARE WORK WITH MY CURRENT CARE TEAM?

Palliative care offers an extra layer of support for you and your family by working in tandem with your current care team.

MYTHS ABOUT SUPPORTIVE AND PALLIATIVE CARE

- 1 Discussing Palliative Care Means we are Giving up Hope**
Palliative care's objective is ensuring the best quality of life for the patient with an advanced illness. This means that you and your care team can continue to discuss curative measures and determine what best meets your objectives considering side effects, efficacy, and capacity to do activities that you enjoy.
- 2 Supportive Care is only Provided in a Hospital**
Most of the time supportive care is provided wherever the patient lives and can change along the continuum of care, including home, long-term care, hospice, hospital and virtual support.
- 3 Supportive Care and Palliative Care is only for People that are at end-of-life**
Supportive care and palliative care are holistic approaches to care that consider the physical, mental, social and spiritual needs of an individual and family faced with a life-limiting disease. Its purpose is to improve quality of life be it for weeks, months or years by helping to manage issues in all spheres including symptoms management, addressing psychosocial hardships, exploring spiritual needs.



RESOURCES

Canadian Virtual Hospice
<https://www.virtualhospice.ca/>

The Canadian Virtual Hospice provides support and personalized information about advanced illness, palliative care, loss and grief, to people living with illness, family members, people working in healthcare, educators, and researchers.

MyGrief.ca
<https://mygrief.ca/>

MyGrief.ca is an online resource to help people move through their grief from the comfort of their own home, at their own pace. It can help you understand your grief and approach some of the most difficult questions that may arise.

Advance care planning Canada
<https://www.advancecareplanning.ca/>

Advance Care Planning is a process of reflection and communication. It is a time for you to reflect on your values and wishes, and to let people know what kind of health and personal care you would want in the future if you were unable to speak for yourself.