



When is it the right time for hospice or palliative care?

Many people believe hospice and palliative care should be reserved only for the last few days of life. This mistaken belief deprives them of the opportunity to live the last six months or more of life to the fullest by taking advantage of the physical, emotional and spiritual comfort that is available.

Each of us needs different kinds of care at different points in our life. Preventive care, for example, helps keep us well. Pre-natal care supports pregnancy and birth. One lesser known care specialty is called Palliative Medicine, the art and science of managing pain and symptoms associated with disease or injury. The goal of Palliative Medicine is to control symptoms, relieve suffering and preserve the best possible quality of life, as determined by the patient and his/her family.

Hospice care is a form of Palliative Medicine offered to patients and their caregivers during the advanced stages of an illness or life-limiting injury. Hospice care also offers grief support to loved ones for 13 months following a patient's death.

Anyone facing a serious illness should understand all available care options, including hospice and palliative care, as early in the disease process as possible so that there is sufficient time to consider, ask questions and plan. Serious consideration should be given to hospice care when the patient:

- No longer responds as expected to treatments of the disease.
- Expresses concern that the burden of treatment is outweighing the benefits.
- Complains consistently about pain or other unrelieved physical symptoms.
- Shows significant, unexplained weight loss
- Experiences increasing need for assistance with activities of daily living.
- Makes frequent short-term trips to the hospital and/or emergency room.
- Is sad or depressed about his or her condition and quality of life.

Samaritan nurses and counselors are available to discuss options with patients, families and physicians. If you have questions, we encourage you to call **1-800-229-8183** at any point during an illness.

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