



Palliative Care

This factsheet in the 'Helpful hints' series aims to explain briefly and answer some of the most commonly asked questions about palliative care. It is only a guide and you can talk about any concerns you may have with the team treating you.

What is palliative care?

Palliative care or palliation means helping to relieve symptoms and concentrate on quality of life, to ensure that you live as comfortably and fully as possible.

This is done by focusing on controlling pain and any other physical symptoms associated with cancer, as well as helping you and your carers with social, spiritual and emotional needs.

Many aspects of palliative care are also applicable earlier in the course of an illness in conjunction with other treatments. Even if the doctors are unable to cure you, there are other ways you can be helped. Many people are made much more comfortable as a result of good symptom assessment from their team, and good symptom control from medication, complementary therapies and psychological support.

Who gives palliative care?

This can be given by a specialised Palliative Care Macmillan Team, by an Oncology Team, by your family doctor (GP) and district nurse, or by a combination of these people working together.

Other people who can give palliative care include Marie Curie nurses, symptom control teams, physiotherapists, occupational therapists (OTs), social workers, counsellors and psychologists. Macmillan specialist nurses work in both hospitals and the community, and, together with your GP and the community or district nurses, they will do their best to personalise your care.

Where can palliative care be given?

Palliative care can be given in your own home, a nursing home, a specialist palliative care unit, a hospice day care centre, or a hospital.

How may a specialist palliative care unit help me?

These multi-professional units, sometimes called hospices, aim to support people at home. They provide short-term, in-patient treatments for symptom control, helping to relieve pain and other symptoms such as nausea and breathlessness.

These services are also available for patients who are coming to the end of their life who do not want to be, or cannot remain, at home. (The length of stay will depend on each person's need and condition.)

Day care offers a therapeutic approach to assess and manage symptoms, sometimes providing medical treatments. Health professionals can provide opportunities such as outings, arts, crafts, aromatherapy as well as counselling and psychological support. It can also offer carers a break during the week.

How will the team of professionals decide how to help me?

They will assess and consider all your needs and as your general health, and take into account any treatments you have had in the past. The aim is to do their best for you, and consider the quality of your life. All the options will be discussed with you, and together you can decide on the best combination of care.

Where is my specialist palliative care unit?

The specialist palliative care unit for the area south of the Mount Vernon Cancer Network is Michael Sobell House at Mount Vernon Hospital (24-hour Palliative Care Helpline: 01923 844281). This may not be the nearest specialist palliative care unit to you, but advice can be given.

Where can I get further information?

Any member of the team treating you will be happy to try and help you.

You can also speak with your Macmillan nurse or to staff in the Lynda Jackson Macmillan Centre (drop-in or call 01923 844014). This is also an answerphone. Please don't use it for emergencies as your message may not be heard or dealt with quickly enough.