

NEW: [A Series of Essays on Palliative Care: Institute of Medicine, Education and Spirituality](#)

All patients require some degree of palliative care services to reduce pain and suffering and to promote spiritual and psychological well-being for both provider and patient. In this column, written for providers, the authors will attempt to discuss issues in palliative care. This is to stimulate conversation, improve knowledge, and recommend reading for further education. The hope is to address the empathy-compassion dynamic, quality of life issues, gender differences in emotional distress, prognostication, aspect of fear, goals of care, the doctrine of double effect, and many psycho-spiritual constructs and tools that can aid the provider to improve his or her palliative care skills.

From time to time, another aspect of palliative care will be offered in a small essay format. These are written by Ochsner physicians for medical professionals.

The Nature of Palliative Care

The word “palliate” means to make a disease or its symptoms less severe or unpleasant without removing the cause. Most of the time our health care system is quite good at treating acute illness, but not all illnesses have a cure. In today’s health care environment, many patients suffer from chronic, progressive and relapsing diseases. For these patients, the health care system can improve the quality and longevity of a patient’s life with excellent nursing care, symptom management, and suggestions for wise life choices. This is the role that palliative care has in any thoughtful healthcare system. The practice of palliative care reduces suffering and improves the quality of life for those patients who are need of such care.

The practice of palliative care aligns health care system values with our patient’s values. Putting the patient-first means that front line providers assess the patient’s values and desires before diagnostic and treatment decisions are made and implemented. This act alone secures patient autonomy and the right to self-determination. Palliative care is a provider’s conscious effort to be compassionate by moderating the fear that patients may have about their future, especially regarding pain management and treatment procedures. Providers who include empathy in the treatment plan provide the necessary information and resources to help the patient. These

providers guide families with decision making that promotes goodness for the patient and family.

A healthcare system, known for its high standards and integrity, contains within it a culture that promotes unbiased co-decision making with the patient's interest at heart. Excellence of care can only be accomplished when providers act to ameliorate the symptoms of disease and help patients feel better. This includes addressing the physical, emotional and spiritual aspects of disease. It takes a team to provide pain management, treat symptoms like shortness of breath, reduce anxiety and depression, address goals of care, and provide social support and spiritual care.

Comments are welcome.

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Other titles in this series on Palliative Care and Integrative Medicine are:

The Nature of Palliative Care
Providers as Leaders in Palliative Care
Non-hospice and Hospice Palliative Care
Grief and Palliative Care
Goals of Care: The Bridge to Hospice
The Components of a Goals of Care Conversation