

What is Palliative Care?

Palliative care is specialized medical care focused on providing relief from symptoms, pain, and stress associated with serious or chronic illnesses. Our goal is to improve your quality of life—physically, emotionally, and spiritually—while supporting you and your loved ones during challenging times.

Palliative care can be provided alongside treatments that aim to cure or manage your illness. You can receive it at any stage of illness. You can receive palliative care whether you are receiving curative treatment or not.

Key Points About Palliative Care:

- **Not just for end-of-life care:** Palliative care is provided at any stage of a serious illness and can be combined with curative treatments.
- **Patient-centered approach:** The focus is on the individual needs of the patient, helping to manage pain and symptoms while addressing emotional, social, and spiritual concerns.
- **Provides support to families:** Palliative care teams help families cope with the challenges of caregiving and make informed decisions about treatment options.

Palliative Care Services Include:

- **Pain and Symptom Management:** This includes managing physical symptoms like pain, nausea, fatigue, and breathing difficulties.
- **Emotional and Psychological Support:** Addressing anxiety, depression, and emotional distress related to illness.
- **Spiritual Support:** For those who seek it, palliative care teams offer spiritual care to help patients and families find meaning, comfort, or peace.
- **Social Work Support:** Helping families with practical matters like coordinating care, making financial arrangements, or accessing community resources.
- **Care Coordination:** The palliative care team works with the patient's other doctors to ensure everyone is working together to provide the best care possible.
- **Advance Care Planning:** We assist with creating an advance care plan, including discussing your healthcare wishes, creating a living will, appointing a healthcare proxy or durable power of attorney.

When Should Palliative Care Be Considered?

- A serious illness, such as cancer, heart disease, chronic lung disease, kidney disease, or neurodegenerative conditions like Alzheimer's.
- If the patient or family is struggling to manage symptoms or if the patient has frequent hospital admissions.
- When there are questions or concerns about the goals of care or treatment options.

How is Palliative Care Different from Hospice?

- **Palliative care** is available to patients at any stage of a serious illness, even while undergoing treatments aimed at curing the illness.
- **Hospice care** is a form of palliative care that is provided when curative treatments are no longer effective, or a patient feels they are no longer providing benefits, and a person is nearing the end of life.

Benefits of Palliative Care:

- **Improved quality of life:** Helps manage pain, nausea, shortness of breath, and other distressing symptoms.
- **Increased satisfaction with care:** Patients and families feel more supported and involved in decision-making.
- **Better communication:** Encourages open conversations between patients, families, and the medical team.

How to Access Palliative Care:

- Palliative care can be provided in hospitals, outpatient clinics, nursing homes, or even at home. Talk to your doctor or healthcare provider about a referral to a palliative care team. They can provide information, answer questions and guide you through your options.
- In West Michigan, we offer palliative care from the comfort of home through Trinity Health At Home. Learn more about the services available through our home-based palliative care program at TrinityHealthAtHome.org/Michigan.

Who Is on the Palliative Care Team?

- **Doctors:** Specialists in palliative care and other fields (oncologists, cardiologists, etc.).
- **Nurses:** With experience in managing pain and symptoms.
- **Social Workers:** To support families and navigate practical issues.
- **Chaplain:** For spiritual and emotional support.
- **Other Therapists:** Like physical, occupational, or speech therapists, depending on the patient's needs (not directly on our team, these are the outside referrals a team can make)
- **If you live in West Michigan** and are interested in palliative care in the comfort of your home, learn more at [Trinity Health at Home/Michigan](https://TrinityHealthAtHome.org/Michigan). Care team roles may vary between home-based and hospital-based palliative care.

Insurance and Coverage

- **Medicare:** Medicare generally **covers palliative care** if it's provided in a hospital, hospice facility, or other healthcare setting. Medicare Part A (Hospital Insurance) often covers services provided in a **hospital or inpatient setting**.
- **Other Insurance:** Most insurance plans have a hospice benefit. Check with your provider for details.

For More Information:

If you think palliative care might be right for you or your loved one, talk to your physician, nurse, or healthcare professional. They can arrange a Palliative Care Information visit and help guide you through the process.