Palliative Care

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Palliative care

• Identifying appropriate palliative consultations
• Primary vs. specialty palliative care
  (The oncology nurse as a palliative provider)
• Symptom management gems
• Communication strategies
• Coping and Self-Care

Definition of Palliative Care

Specialized medical care for people with serious illnesses... focused on providing patients with relief from the symptoms, pain, and stress of a serious illness - whatever the diagnosis

The goal is to improve quality of life for both the patient and family... provided by a team of doctors, nurses, and other specialists who work with a patient's other doctors to provide an extra layer of support

Palliative care is appropriate at any age and at any stage in a serious illness, and can be provided together with curative treatment

Center to Advance Palliative Care 2011
Dichotomous model of health care delivery:

- Early models: "Life-prolonging vs. palliative care"
  - Palliative care was
    - Equated with "end-of-life" only
    - Delivered late in course of illness
    - ICU's, or uncontrolled symptoms
    - Interventions were too late, no longer desired
  - Driven by reimbursement system:
    - Regular Medicare covers curative therapies
    - Medicare hospice covers comfort care

3 common trajectories of late-life illness:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Palliative care vs. hospice:</th>
<th>Related but distinct</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Palliative Care</strong></td>
<td><strong>Hospice</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Initiation</td>
<td>Ideally with onset of symptoms, or anywhere along disease trajectory</td>
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<td>Life-prolonging therapy?</td>
<td>May continue concurrently</td>
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<tr>
<td>Site of care delivery</td>
<td>In hospitals or outpatient settings, expanding...</td>
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<tr>
<td>Goals of care</td>
<td>Goal-setting (cure, life prolongation, QOL, function)</td>
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<td>Symptom management</td>
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<td>Enhance quality of life</td>
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<td>Maximize function</td>
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<td>Support primary care team before patient is terminally ill</td>
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<td>Interdisciplinary</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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Goals of palliative care

- Improving quality of life
  - Comprehensive symptom management
  - Patient and family support
  - Spiritual support
- Assistance with decision-making
  - Shared decision making
  - Goals of care
  - Advance care planning
- Communication amongst all those involved in care
- Coordination across all sites of care
- Minimize invasive interventions in late stages of illness
- Staff support
Palliative care specialists can not assume all aspects of care

- Important for Palliative Care tools and techniques to be incorporated into basic nursing skill sets and standards of practice.
- Nurses play a crucial role in communication and symptom management in patients with advanced illness.
- Nurses should have a meaningful presence in all phases of care and planning. Attend those family meetings.

Primary palliative care

- Basic management of pain and symptoms
- Basic management of depression and anxiety
- Basic discussions about
  - Prognosis
  - Goals of treatment
  - Suffering
  - Code status

Specialty palliative care

- Management of refractory pain or other symptoms
- Management of more complex depression, anxiety, grief, and existential distress
- Assistance with conflict resolution regarding goals or methods of treatment
  - Within families
  - Between staff and families
  - Among treatment teams
- Assistance in addressing cases of near futility

When to seek palliative care

• A potentially life-limiting or life-threatening condition and...
  – Primary criteria
    • The “surprise question”: You would not be surprised if the patient died within 12 months.
    • Frequent admissions (e.g. more than 1 admission for same condition within several months)
    • Complex care requirement (e.g. functional dependency; complex home support for ventilator/antibiotics/.feedings)
    • Declines in function, feeding intolerance, or unintended decline in weight (e.g. failure to thrive)

Criteria for a palliative care assessment: at the time of admission

– Secondary criteria
  • Admission from long-term care facility or medical foster home
  • Elderly patient, cognitively impaired, with acute hip fracture
  • Metastatic or locally advanced incurable cancer
  • Chronic home oxygen use
  • Out-of-hospital cardiac arrest
  • Current or past hospice program enrollee
  • Limited social support (e.g. family stress, chronic mental illness)
  • No history of completing an advance care planning discussion/document

Symptom Management Basics

Oral morphine equivalents

• The “1:2:3” rule:
  – 1 mg IV MS =
  – 2 mg PO oxycodone =
  – 3 mg PO MS

• The “30:20:10:7.5:1.5” rule:
  – 30 mg PO MS =
  – 20 mg PO oxycodone =
  – 10 mg IV MS =
  – 7.5 mg PO hydromorphone =
  – 1.5 mg IV hydromorphone

Example:
Pt. taking MS Contin 60 mg q12h + oxycodone 10 mg q6h prn, 2x/4.
How many oral morphine equivalents?

Morphine = 60 x 2 = 120
Oxycodone = 10 x 3 x (3/2) = 45
Oral morphine equivalents = 175
Management of opioid side effects

- **Nausea**
  - Usually temporary, 3-5 days
  - Antidopaminergic antiemetics (metoclopramide, prochlorperazine)
  - Refractory—try corticosteroids, or ondansetron
  - More constant drug levels helpful—change to long-acting, topical, or shorter dose intervals
- **Constipation**
  - stimulant (Senna or bisacodyl), or osmotic laxative (polyethylene glycol; or mag. citrate, lactulose)
  - Stool softeners alone ineffective
- **Pruritus**
  - Rare; caused by histamine release
  - Switch to another opioid
  - antihistamines
- **Sedation**
  - Dissipates as tolerance develops
  - Dose reduction or drug rotation

Visceral pain

- Dull, colicky, poorly localized
- Caused by distention, torsion, inflammation
- Pancreatic, hepatic, renal, intestinal cancer
- Autonomic symptoms—nausea, diaphoresis
- Referred pain—liver, gallbladder -> R shoulder
- Constipation—disease, meds., immobility
- Palliative surgery to relieve obstruction
- Blockade of celiac, sympathetic or splanchnic plexuses

Neuropathic pain

- Direct pathologic changes to central or peripheral nervous system
  - Nerve root compression, encroachment of fibers on nerve plexus
  - Burning, tingling, stabbing, shooting
- Corticosteroids
  - reduce edema and pain of obstruction; improve mood/appetite/energy
  - Lyse certain tumors, enhancing analgesic effects of pain meds.
  - Effective for:
    - malignant infiltration of brachial and lumbar plexus
    - cord compression
    - headache from brain tumors
- Peripheral neuropathy
  - Opioids
  - TCA’s
  - Venlafaxine or duloxetine—for dual pain and depression
  - Gabapentin
  - Pregabalin

Bone pain

- Bone metastases
  - XRT
  - Corticosteroids
  - Bisphosphonates
  - Interventional procedures
    - Cryoablation
    - Radiofrequency ablation
Fatigue

- The most common symptom
- Underdiagnosed, undertreated
- Contributors
  - Cancer, cancer treatment, anemia, mood disorders, sleep, pain/anxiety, infections, deconditioning, cachexia, hypoxia, dehydration, polypharmacy, etc.
- Treatment—aimed at underlying causes
  - Pharm: steroid, megestrol, methylphenidate, antidepressants

Dyspnea

- Causes:
  - Cardiac or pulmonary processes
  - Dehilitation
  - Wasting syndromes
  - Neurodegenerative disorders
  - Progressive, chronic disease
- Potentially treatable causes
  - Pleural effusions
  - Pneumonia
  - Severe anemia
  - Ascites
- Subjective severity correlates poorly with resp. rate, ABG, SaO2 %, use of accessory muscles

Dyspnea

- Treatment:
  - Gold standard: oral morphine, low dose 10-20 mg/day
  - Benzodiazepines NOT consistently useful, unless treating anxiety
  - O2: useful if hypoxemic, but otherwise no better than room air
  - Nonpharmacologic
    - Breathing training, gait aids, neuroelectrical muscle stimulation, chest wall vibration
    - Music therapy, relaxation, fan use, counseling, psychotherapy

Nausea: which treatment for which cause?

- Opioids: dopaminergic signaling (metoclopramide, prochlorperazine)
- Chemotherapy: serotonin antagonists (ondansetron)
- Increased intracranial pressure: corticosteroids
- Mechanical bowel obstruction:
  - Pharm: dexamethasone, octreotide, haloperidol
  - Non-pharm: venting gastrostomy; sleeve
- Radiation: serotonin antagonists (ondansetron)
- Motion sickness, cerebellar mets.: anticholinergic antihistamines (scopolamine, meclizine, diphenhydramine)
- If obstruction ruled out: metoclopramide + dexamethasone; glycopyrrolate (antichol.)
Agitation, distress

- Reversible causes: pain, urinary retention, fecal impaction
- Delirium: diagnosis of exclusion
- Manifestations of distress: non-specific
  - Hyperactivity vs. apathy
  - Moaning or grunting
  - Irregular breathing and tracheal secretions (“death rattle”)
- Very distressing for families; clinician plays key role in educating re. signs of death and dying
- Prophylactic anticholinergics (scopolamine) during active dying reduce tracheal secretions

Delirium

- Definition: acute change in mental status
- R/O treatable causes: meds., pain, urinary obstruction, bowel impaction, sensory deprivation
- Treatment:
  - Small doses haloperidol; chlorpromazine (10-25 mg po or sq; more sedating)
  - Avoid benzos: paradoxical worsening
  - Non-pharm: re-orienting; bedside sitter

Depression

- Transiently depressed mood normal in serious, life-threatening illness
- Symptoms persisting weeks and meeting diagnostic criteria for depression are not “normal”, and should be treated
  - Grief vs. depression
- Pharmacologic treatments:
  - SSRI’s
  - Methylphenidate
  - Mirtazapine (depression w/ insomnia, anorexia)
  - TCA’s, duloxetine, venlafaxine (w/ neuropathic pain)
Anorexia

- Common in cancer and chronic disease
- Eating/enjoying food essential in social interactions
- Distressing to patients and families
  - "Giving up!", guilt for caregivers and patients
- Educating patients and caregivers
- Appetite stimulants if death not imminent
  - Progestins
    - Megestrol 400-800 mg po qd
    - Medroxyprogesterone 500 mg po bid
  - Side effects: thromboembolic, hyperglycemia, adrenal suppression, vaginal bleeding
  - Corticosteroids
    - Dexamethasone 2-4 mg po bid
  - No impact on mortality, +/- QOL

Summary: Evidence based interventions

1. Regularly assess patients for:
   - Pain
   - Dyspnea
   - Depression
2. Use therapies of proven effectiveness to manage pain
   - NSAIDs
   - Opioids
   - Bisphosphonates (bone pain in breast, ca, myeloma)
3. Use therapies of proven effectiveness to manage dyspnea
   - Opioids
   - CM for Hypoventilation
   - Respiratory Sedatives (IPVAS)
4. Use therapies of proven effectiveness to manage depression
   - SSRIs, TCA's
   - Psychotherapy
5. Ensure advance care planning occur
   - Navigate decision makers
   - Reevaluation and emergency treatment
   - Should occur early in course
   - Discussions about
     - Tube feedings
     - Initiation or continuation of chemotherapy
     - Consideration of referral criteria


Alternative Therapies

- Tesla balls, Bacon Wraps, Foldger’s Crystals, copper panels, light therapy, Frankincense, photon balancing, goat testicles, Ph balancing, shredded beets in Mexico, dining on endangered species?! How do you support hope and desperation and individual choice and how do you protect vulnerable patients from con artists and hucksters.

Issues Specific to WA

(*Not practiced w/in VA-Federal system)

Medical Marijuana
- Focusing on safety

Physician Assisted Suicide
- Addressing the concerns, fears and emotions behind the question first. Educating people about all options including palliative sedation. Policy varies by facility.
- Online resources available.
**Spiritual and psychological distress**

- “Are spirituality or religion important in your life?”
- “What brings purpose to your life?”
- “This sort of illness often raises significant questions...How are you dealing with this?”
- Consult your Chaplain!
- “Hoping for a Miracle”

**Miracles**

- Emotional adaptation
- Avoidance mechanism
- Expression of religious beliefs
- A test of faith
- Last hope

**Belief in Miracles**

- 57 % believed God could save patient even if MDs declared treatment futile
- 1 in 5 MDs & medical workers believed God could reverse a hopeless outcome
- 61 % of 1006 adults believed a person in a vegetative state could be saved by a miracle
- 20.2 % of trauma professionals believed the same

**Factors contributing to effective coping**

- Good communication
- Trust among patient, family, and clinical team
- Opportunities to share fears and concerns
- Meticulous attention to physical symptoms
- Attention to psychological and spiritual concerns
Communication Challenges

• Effective communication skills
  – To family, more important than clinical skills
  – Only ½ of families understand basic information
  – Use simple explanations
  – Use the words “dying” and “death”
  – Use a professional interpreter

• Words to avoid:
  – Withdrawal of CARE
  – There’s nothing more we can do

Communication in the acute setting

Words that Work

• Ask
  – What do you understand?
  – What do you want to know?

• Tell
  – Necessary information

• Ask
  – Their understanding

• “I wish”
• “I worry”

Guided Narrative

Stu & Lu Farber 2013, may use for education only, all other uses require permission

What do you already know?
  ❖ What is your understanding of your situation?
  ❖ How do you see things?
What is important to you right now?
  ❖ What is important to discuss today?
  ❖ What do you see as your future?
What are your experiences?
  ❖ Have you ever cared for someone who is seriously ill?
  ❖ What are your experiences with loss?
How do you cope with difficulties?
  ❖ Where do you draw strength to get through each day?
Guided Narrative

Who are your social supports?
- Who would speak for you if you can’t?
- Who will you depend on for help?

What are your goals for care?
- What are you hoping for?
- What are you concerned (worried) about?
- What do you feel is really important to do in the time left to you?

What else do you want me to know about who you are or what you believe?

64% doubted prognosis
- <2% based their belief on MDs prognosis
- 32% chose life support with < 1% chance of survival

Allowing time

- 64% doubted prognosis
- <2% based their belief on MDs prognosis
- 32% chose life support with < 1% chance of survival

What about you?

- Self care:
  - Recognize how patient’s death impacts you
  - Recognize signs of moral distress
  - Recognize signs of compassion fatigue
  - Know signs of Burnout

- Resources:
  - Chaplain
  - Preceptor / mentor
  - Co-workers
  - Manager
  - Palliative Care team
  - Employee Assistance Programs
  - Professional counseling

Surviving in the “grey area”

- “The key to mindfulness is learning to look at the world in a more conditional way. Understanding that our perspective is merely one among alternative views requires us to embrace uncertainty. When we’re uncertain and unsure, our surroundings become interesting again, like the peculiar little details we notice when we arrive in an unfamiliar place.”
Mindfulness Technique:
(becoming less reactive)

Facing crisis or tough problem:
• Recognize you’ve already made unwarranted assumptions (Something is going to happen, that something will be bad)
• Give yourself 3 reasons the worrisome issue might not happen
• Give yourself 3 reasons that if it does happen and turn out bad, good things will also happen (what are the good outcomes in addition to the bad)

What does Saving Lives Mean?
Redefining our perspective

• Physical recovery to meaningful life?
• Patient/family definition may be ok with what we ourselves perceive as “poor” quality of life
• May have alternative meanings: Peace of mind, creating meaningful living and dying experiences, closure, recognizing and validating a life well lived (or endured,) developing story or narrative about past, healing relationships, not letting people get lost in fear and loneliness, being there to hear and recognize and validate their experience.

Learning the backstory...

• Fully understanding the patient and family experience, knowing who they are
• Motives and choices gleaned from a life story
• Eliminate assumptions and prejudice
• Read multidisciplinary notes, share the story with the entire team, develop care plan accordingly
• Pictures, “getting to know you poster,” life review, and reminiscence questions
Create an understanding of why people make specific choices, based on their own complex life experiences

Self Care:

• Consider grief resolution rituals/ceremonies
• Debriefing for stressful cases or loss
• Peer-supported story telling, group outings/gatherings
Self Kindness

• Cultivate an awareness of when you are self-criticizing, blaming or condemning and STOP.
• Remind yourself of the good nursing practices you engaged today
• Give yourself three compliments about what you’ve done well
• Celebrate and share the little moments of success, humor, teamwork

Bibliography

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