



# KNOWING YOUR PALLIATIVE CARE TEAM MEMBERS

**Keep in mind that everyone is different in terms of how a disease may impact their quality of life.**

While you may not access all these health care providers or other experts, each has a role as a member of a palliative care team and can help assure that you achieve the best possible quality of life.

## Clinical Team Members

If you feel that you or a loved one could benefit from palliative care, speak with your primary care physician who will be able to guide you in the right direction and provide referrals for clinical team members.

### Physicians

Your treating healthcare physician has expertise in your disease and understands how it impacts other body systems. This physician, who will be a vital member of your palliative care team, may be your primary care physician, an oncologist, or other disease specialist.

### Palliative Care Physician

The goals of a palliative care physician are to prevent or alleviate suffering to improve your quality of life. With specialty training in this unique subset of healthcare, a palliative care physician can help you or a loved one face a difficult diagnosis.

### Pain Management Experts

Pain can impact people in many ways. In addition to being physically disruptive, it also can take a toll on your mental health and well-being. Working with pain management experts to improve your pain levels can transform your quality of life.

## Nurses

Nurses are trained to be attentive to your needs as a patient. They support you in terms of physical and mental comfort, education, and acceptance and coping, and can provide counsel to families.

## Registered Dietitian

Food is medicine. Regardless of whether the disease state is curable, a dietitian plays a role in palliative care. Optimal nutrition and hydration reduce physical deterioration and supports quality of life.

## Physical Therapist

Movement is good for the body as well as the mind. Physical therapists can help you preserve strength, balance, and independence through movement. Even someone with a progressive and aggressive illness can benefit from physical therapy, which supports mobility, helps maintain and/or restore function, and aids in the reduction of symptoms.

## Occupational Therapists

According to the American Occupational Therapy Association, palliative care occupational therapists assist by promoting participation in meaningful life experiences and activities of daily living (ADLs).

These providers share a common goal of supporting the highest quality of life possible for their patients.

## Additional Team Members

In addition to clinical team members who assist with physical concerns, other members of a palliative care team provide support for the mind and spirit and can help attend to your affairs.

### Complimentary & Alternative Medicine

According to an article published in *Integrative Cancer Therapies*, about 40 percent of cancer patients receiving palliative care also practiced complementary and alternative medicines. These alternative treatments, which include reiki, massage therapy, acupuncture, meditation, and others, can improve quality of life and help alleviate suffering.

### Social Workers

Not only do social workers help coordinate care, they serve as advocates. Social workers can assist in facilitating conversations with your family, or help you with transitions throughout your treatment process. Licensed clinical social workers can even provide therapy and counseling for you and family members throughout the experience of managing and navigating a severe illness, as well as refer you to social service programs you may be eligible for.

### Mental Health Professionals

Mental and physical health are interrelated. Chronic, serious illness often co-occurs with behavioral and/or mental health concerns. The Cleveland Clinic suggests an estimated one-third of people diagnosed with a serious, life-changing chronic illness or disease will experience symptoms of depression. Feelings of sadness and depression are normal, but when they persist, treatment may be necessary. Even though things may look bleak when you're ill, in pain, or trying new treatments with difficult side effects, counseling and therapy can improve your quality of life. It's estimated that of the people with mental health concerns who seek treatment, between 60 and 80 percent experience some level of recovery from their mental health concerns.

## Spiritual Professionals

When facing a progressive illness like dementia, COPD, heart failure or even cancer, coping with your experience is essential in preserving quality of life. A clergy member or spiritual professional can work with you and your family to help you cope with present experiences and offer prayer, scripture, and healing to improve your quality of life. Accepting your present situation supports your spiritual, mental, and physical health. In addition, making amends and working through anything important to you spiritually as you face a serious, life-changing diagnosis is another crucial role of spiritual professionals. While we recognize not everyone shares the same belief system, we highlight the value of seeking counsel and support from spiritual professionals while experiencing palliative care.

### Legal Experts

Adding a legal professional to your palliative care team can help ensure that your affairs are in order. Advanced planning and preparation of a living will, powers of attorney, and trust can provide you and your family with peace of mind, knowing that your affairs are in order and your wishes will be carried out to protect you and your loved ones. These decisions are best made during a time of clarity, not in the middle of a crisis.

### Financial Advisors

Part of getting your affairs in order includes your finances. It's essential to understand your financial picture and what will be available should you have a long-term illness or any situation where you would be unable to work. Understanding what short and long-term disability insurance you have along with life insurance, death benefits, social security, and funeral costs is necessary for peace of mind. Keeping organized and communicating with your family regarding your estate plan alleviates unneeded stress during a time of crisis or illness.

## Utilizing ConnectCare3

Our Nurse Navigators can help you navigate the complex healthcare system when facing a difficult diagnosis.

Additionally, our Registered Dietitians can provide you assistance in developing a diet that fits your dietary restrictions, lifestyle, and diagnosis.

Nurse Journal. "Palliative Care Nurse Careers and Salary Outlook"

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The American Occupational Therapy Association. "The Role of Occupational Therapy in Palliative and Hospice Care"

Accessed at [https://www.aota.org/-/media/Corporate/Files/AboutOT/Professionals/WhatsOT/PA/Facts/FactSheet\\_PalliativeCare.pdf](https://www.aota.org/-/media/Corporate/Files/AboutOT/Professionals/WhatsOT/PA/Facts/FactSheet_PalliativeCare.pdf)

Palliative Doctors. "The Team Approach," "Frequently Asked Questions About Hospice and Palliative Care," "What Does a Palliative Doctor Do?"

Accessed at <https://palliativedoctors.org/>

Today's Dietitian. "Nutrition Support at the End of Life: A Critical Decision."

Accessed at <https://www.todaysdietitian.com/newarchives/082508p68.shtml>

Mental Health America. "Being An Effective Caregiver."

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