

What is palliative care?

Helping people with life-limiting illness to live well

Palliative care is an integrated, holistic approach to care.

It is focused on helping people to live their lives as fully and as comfortably as possible while they are also living with life-limiting illness.

The aim of palliative care is to relieve distressing symptoms, improve quality of life and enable each patient, and their family, to make decisions about how they wish to spend the remainder of their life.

Palliative care supports people of any age who have been told that they have a life-limiting illness that cannot be cured.

It can assist people with illnesses such as cancer, motor neurone disease, advanced dementia and end-stage kidney, heart or lung disease.

Depending on your needs, palliative care may include:

- medication and other therapies to relieve your pain and manage your symptoms
- support for your whānau / family members
- assistance and equipment to enable you to live comfortably at home where possible
- help to meet your spiritual, religious or cultural needs
- regular visits from health workers and other care providers

Palliative care does not mean the end

A palliative approach to care can be used at any time in your illness, not just when you are at the end of your life. Using palliative care does not mean there is no hope, you have 'given up' or your family doesn't care.

While treatment, such as radiotherapy or chemotherapy, can often be continued the focus of care is on relieving symptoms and maintaining your quality of life. Complementary therapies or traditional medicines can still be a part of your care.

Who provides palliative care?

Care is usually provided by a team of health professionals, coordinated by your general practitioner or family doctor. The make-up of this team depends on your specific needs and may include:

- your general practitioner
- palliative care specialists
- nurses
- homecare workers
- allied health professionals – including social workers, dietitians, physiotherapists
- counsellors and pastoral support people

The team of health professionals involved in delivering care will work with you and your carer where you are living or where you receive treatment.

This may be at home or in a residential care facility.

It can also be in a hospital or hospice.

For more information about palliative care go to www.healthnavigator.org.nz