

## What Families Need to Know About Palliative Care

Palliative care (pronounced *pal-ee-at-ive*) is a philosophy of care that focuses on two main things. It first seeks to support individuals coping with a terminal illness to experience the highest quality of life possible, for as long as possible. Next, a palliative care philosophy also endeavours to make the dying experience as positive and pain-free as possible by providing care and compassion for the whole person: body, mind and soul.

This approach to care results in the very best quality end of life for the individual. It then goes one step further: it also offers support to the dying person's family, friends and caregivers.

Palliation is one of the most important issues to shape health care today. It reflects society's desire to return to traditional values and back to the basics, where easing the dying process and making the utmost of whatever time is left for individuals and the people they love has regained new importance.

The palliative care movement was born in the 1960s in Britain as a Christian protest movement against hospitals' harsh treatment of the dying. Today people are choosing comprehensive palliative care that is being provided in a multitude of settings including homes, hospitals, hospices and long-term care centres.

The introduction of palliative care that focuses on the wishes and needs of the individual provides a holistic approach, which reflects a stronger, more complete understanding and total respect for the individual's choices and wishes regarding his or her care. This gives control back to the ill or dying person and places the palliation team (nurses, physicians and other support persons) in a service role.

Where all efforts to save the life of an individual have been exhausted and death is imminent, being able to provide palliative care to the dying person assists the caregiver to better cope with the dying process knowing they are meeting the needs and wishes of the individual and the family. The introduction of palliative care into society in general and long-term care specifically has made us a more compassionate and empathetic society.

What makes palliative care such a good idea? Many things:

- It allows people who are dying to spend their last days in a familiar place – e.g., the long-term care home where they've made friends with staff – rather than surrounded by strangers in a hospital.
- It finds out what's important to the person who is dying, and then tries to meet those needs, as well as manage pain and symptoms.
- It meets the person's and family's needs for information.
- It attempts to meet a dying individual's need to talk, connect and resolve unfinished business.
- It allows the dying process to be a period of positive, forward movement, a time of fulfillment, growth and inner peace.
- The dying process is unique for everyone, and palliative care ensures that care is individualized.
- It recognizes the vital role played by families and significant others, and tries to meet families' needs for time out.
- As hospital beds close, more and more people choose to receive care at home or in a long-term care home. Palliative care is one of the services that may be provided in either setting.

Recognizing the importance of the philosophy of palliation, all Extendicare homes offer some degree of palliative care, supported by teams of skilled, compassionate interdisciplinary healthcare givers who have been trained in areas such as counselling, pain control and the intricacies of the dying process.

If you want more information on the palliative care options available within the long-term care home, please feel free to speak with the director of care.