HELPING SERIOUSLY ILL PATIENTS LIVE WELL: THE ROLE OF PALLIATIVE CARE

April Zehm, MD
Division of Palliative Care
Massachusetts General Hospital
Harvard Medical School
Patients with serious illness want:

- Relief of pain and other symptoms
- Relief of burdens on family
- To achieve a sense of control
- To strengthen relationships with loved ones
- Informed, shared decision-making with medical care team

Singer et al, JAMA 1999
What is palliative care?

- Specialized medical care for people with **serious illness**
- Focused on providing **relief from the symptoms, pain, and stress** of serious illness
- Goal is to **improve quality of life** for both the **patient and the family**
What is palliative care?

- **Interdisciplinary teams** who work with a patient’s other doctors to provide an extra layer of support

- Appropriate at **any stage** in a serious illness, and **can be provided together with curative treatments**
Palliative care is much broader than hospice.
Early, integrated palliative care has important benefits

- Better quality of life
- Less depression
- Less aggressive treatments & hospitalizations
- Lived 30% longer

Temel, et al, NEJM 2010
Multiple studies demonstrate the benefits of early palliative care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Randomized Trials of Early Specialty Palliative Care Interventions in Patients with Cancer.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Trial</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brumley et al.⁶</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gade et al.⁹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bakitas et al.¹⁰</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Termel et al.¹¹</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimmermann et al.¹²</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* ED denotes emergency department, ICU intensive care unit, and PC palliative care.
Palliative Care

Physical Symptoms

Emotional Symptoms

Medical decision-making
Pain is a common physical symptom in serious illness

- Cancer-related pain is common
  - 20-50% of early cancer
  - 80% of advanced cancer
- Pain can come from cancer itself or from cancer treatments like surgery, radiation, chemotherapy
- Many different types of pain → treatment is based on this and many other factors
Treatment of pain is complex, and often requires a multi-modal approach

- Acetaminophen
- Anti-inflammatory agents (NSAIDs, steroids)
- Opioids
- Neuropathic agents
- Bisphosphonates
- Physical therapy
- Exercise
- Acupuncture, massage, reiki, mindfulness, etc.
- Radiation
- Interventional therapies (nerve blocks, epidural injections, intra-thecal drug delivery, cryoablation, vertebral augmentation)
Physical suffering is more than just pain

- Nausea: 70% of cancer patients
- Shortness of breath: 70% cancer
- Fatigue: 80% cancer
- Delirium: 90% of terminal cancer
- Many others…
Suffering can also extend beyond the physical

- Depression: 5-10% early cancer, up to 60% advanced cancer
- Anxiety: 10-20% cancer
- Adjustment issues: 50% cancer
- Patient and family coping
Palliative Care

- Physical Symptoms
- Emotional Symptoms
- Medical decision-making
Palliative care helps tailor care to patients’ values

Patient expertise
- Goals and Values

Clinician expertise
- Prognosis and medical options

Patient-Centered Care
Palliative care can extend into survivorship

- Many people do well, but some people can have residual post-treatment issues:
  - Pain (post-surgical, chemo-related, radiation-related)
  - Fatigue
  - Depression and anxiety
  - Cognitive/memory impairment
  - Lymphedema
  - Others…
Palliative care IS

- Excellent evidence-based treatment
- Vigorous care of pain and symptoms throughout illness
- Care that can be given at the same time as efforts to cure disease or prolong life
- Empowering patients & families
- Tailoring medical care to patients’ values
- Living better with serious or life-threatening Illness
Palliative care is NOT

- “Giving up”
- “We have nothing left to offer”
- In place of curative or life prolonging treatment
- The same as hospice
- “Just for the dying”
Questions?