

What is Palliative Care?

Many people are familiar with the concept of Hospice Care, but may have less understanding of what is meant by “palliative care.” As access to this service expands in our area, Healthy Peninsula’s “Choices that Matter” wants to help all community members understand what palliative care is, and who might benefit from it.

Palliative care providers work as a team (often comprised of nurse practitioners, physicians, nurses, and social workers) to help people of all ages living with serious illness, whether that illness is curable, chronic, or life threatening. Our goal is to enhance each person’s quality of life by managing the symptoms of their illness, supporting them and their families emotionally, connecting them with needed resources, and facilitating excellent advance care planning, including the completion of Advance Directives. Most importantly, we strive to understand each person’s goals, and to help ensure that the medical care they receive along their journey aligns with their unique values, wishes, and priorities.

Palliative care can be provided to people who are at any stage of their illness, including those actively seeking cure, *and* those with incurable disease who have shifted their focus to quality of life and management of symptoms. Serious health problems like cancer, heart failure, kidney failure, dementia, and advanced neurological or lung disease are examples of the type of concerns that lead patients to seek help from palliative care teams.

In Hancock County, home-based palliative care consults are available through the VNA Palliative Care program ((800) 757-3326, or vnahomehealth.org/Services/Palliative-Care). In the Bangor region, EMMC provides palliative care services to hospitalized patients at Eastern Maine Medical Center, as well as in the outpatient “Supportive Care” clinic located at the Lafayette Family Cancer Center in Brewer (207-973-6604, or www.emmc.org/Supportive-Care).

This column was written by Zoe Tenney, F.N.P of Blue Hill Memorial Hospital. She is also a part-time medical provider for VNA Palliative Care program and a member of the Advisory Board for Choices That Matter, a community project anchored by Healthy Peninsula, through which partners (including Blue Hill Memorial Hospital, Hospice Volunteers of Hancock County, Blue Hill Public Library, Age-Friendly Coastal Communities, and VNA Home Health Hospice) have designed , a variety of conversational tools, information sources and educational techniques to help individuals, families, healthcare providers and communities make thoughtful and informed end-of-life care decisions. For more information on Choices That Matter call Healthy Peninsula at 374-3257 or email info@healthypeninsula.org