

Definition

Palliative care is the active total care of patients whose disease is not responsive to curative treatment. Control of pain, of other symptoms, and of psychological, social and spiritual problems, is paramount to provide the best quality of life for patients and their families. Careful assessment of symptoms and needs of the patient should be undertaken by a multidisciplinary team.¹

The World Health Organization defines palliative care as:²

'an approach that improves the quality of life of patients and their families facing the problem associated with life threatening illness, through the prevention and relief of suffering by means of early identification and impeccable assessment and treatment of pain and other problems, physical, psychosocial and spiritual.

Palliative care:

- *provides relief from pain and other distressing symptoms*
- *affirms life and regards dying as a normal process*
- *intends neither to hasten or postpone death*
- *integrates the psychological and spiritual aspects of patient care*
- *offers a support system to help patients live as actively as possible until death*
- *offers a support system to help the family/carers cope during the patient's illness and in their own bereavement*
- *uses a team approach to address the needs of patients and their families/carers, including bereavement counselling, if indicated*
- *will enhance quality of life, and may also positively influence the course of illness, and*
- *is applicable early in the course of illness, in conjunction with other therapies that are intended to prolong life, such as chemotherapy or radiation therapy, and includes those investigations needed to better understand and manage distressing clinical complications.'*