

# Palliative Care in the Intensive Care Unit



*Health Education*

Having a family member in the intensive care unit can be a very scary time. Things happen quickly, and patients and their families often face many challenges. This can be very stressful for the patient and the family. Not knowing what to expect and feeling fearful are common.

For some patients, the palliative care team is an appropriate resource and your doctor may consult this team. The team provides a group of caregivers who can meet with the patient and the family to answer some key questions. They can get to know the patient's needs better and together with family and the patient decide what the most appropriate ongoing care would be.

The team is led by a specially trained doctor who is an expert in looking at the "big picture" and who will help direct the care that focuses on symptoms and response to treatments. The doctor is assisted by advanced practice nurses, as well as by the unit nurses, chaplain, social worker, pharmacist, dietitian and other therapists. This team will work closely with the attending doctor and complement the other medical care that is being provided.

The goals of the palliative care team are to:

- Support informed decision-making and ensure that patient and family wishes and goals are respected
- Promote dignity and quality of life for the patient and family
- Provide the best methods of relief of pain and other symptoms
- Provide care to meet the needs of body, mind and spirit of the patient and family

The palliative team will listen to the hopes, wishes, values and goals of care for the patient and family. They will talk with you about the probable course of the patient's illness. This may include talking about:

- Current symptoms and treatments
- Decisions about life-sustaining and life-extending measures
- Plans for a changing or worsening condition
- Choice of a decision-maker should the need arise if the patient is no longer able to make his or her own health care decisions
- Arrangements for post-hospital care

Giving support and information are important in providing quality care. The palliative care service joins the medical team to assure that the care you or your loved one receives will be the very best care possible.