



Tip Sheet

Responding to *The New England Journal of Medicine* Early Palliative Care Study

The exciting and important study, [Early Palliative Care for Patients with Metastatic Non-Small-Cell Lung Cancer](#), released in *The New England Journal of Medicine* (August 19, 2010) received tremendous attention in the press. Stories ran in [The New York Times](#), [Associated Press](#), [Boston Globe](#), [USA Today](#), the [Wall Street Journal](#) and over 280 other media outlets. Just before this study, there was a powerful article in [The New Yorker](#) by Atul Gawande, MD. This extensive coverage provides an opportunity to bring attention to the benefits of palliative care.

Conducted at Massachusetts General Hospital, the study showed that patients with metastatic lung cancer who received palliative care along with standard treatment showed improved quality of life, less depression and lived longer than patients who received standard treatment alone. In the same issue, an [editorial review](#) of the study by Diane E. Meier, MD and Amy S. Kelly, MD summarized the findings and implications.

This is an opportunity to leverage the important results! To help you, we have put together a tip sheet for media relations, helpful links and key messages:

Key Messages and Talking Points

Tip: Focus on 1-3 messages to make your point. Which points you choose will depend on the interview.

- The data show that patients receiving palliative care early in their illness lived longer and with better quality of life, including decreased depression.
- The results underscore the need for palliative care early in a serious illness.
- The results would appear to refute the notion that palliative care means giving up. Patients received palliative care alongside their curative treatment.
- Although this is only one study, it is an exciting one. The results are not surprising. Palliative care clinicians regularly see these outcomes in practice.
- The study didn't look at the reasons why the palliative care group felt better and lived longer, but possible reasons may include: patients who feel better are more likely to keep their doctor appointments, complete their treatments and take their medications.
- Palliative care is available in over 50% of US hospitals. It should be available in all hospitals to make sure that all people facing serious illness can access it.

How You Can Use the Study

Tip: Don't overplay the longevity finding itself. Although the findings are strong and definitive, the study must be replicated. Emphasize that early palliative care intervention (even from the point of diagnosis) = appropriate and beneficial treatments, increased quality of life and may lead to prolonged life. Palliative care is about improving quality of life, and this is what we must make clear.

- If your local media has already run a story on the study, consider sending a "letter to the editor" commenting on the study's importance and the benefits of palliative care you witness daily. You can also post a comment online or write and submit an opinion piece on the study.
- If your local media has not already done a story, find a patient that illustrates the study and who is willing to speak with the press. Send an email to the health reporter (print or online media) or producer (broadcast media) and "pitch" the story based on the study as the news hook.
- Keep this and other studies (i.e., cost-savings; variability in access) top of mind for future media outreach.
- Read Christian Sinclair's Pallimed post, "[How to make the NEJM Early Palliative Care Article Spread](#)" and follow his recommendations.
- Use the study when talking to your fellow clinicians, hospital administrators, patients and their families, donors, neighbors, friends and casual acquaintances. Tell everyone.

Media Tips

Reporters and producers typically seek the following things in a health story:

- **News:** NEJM study
- **Supporting statistics:** Use the data from the NEJM study
- **Human interest story:** Provide examples of patients you've treated, and ask patients and family members if they would be interested in talking with the media about their experience with palliative care.
- **Action:** People hospitalized with a serious illness should ask their doctor for a palliative care referral. Patients and families can learn more about palliative care at www.getpalliativecare.org

Related Useful Links

[CAPC Media Toolkit](#)

[Marketing Tools section of capc.org](#)

[Palliative Care in the News section of capc.org](#)

["How to make the NEJM Early Palliative Care Article Spread"](#), (Pallimed blog, by Christian Sinclair, MD)

["Letting Go: What should medicine do when it can't save your life?"](#) (*The New Yorker*, by Atul Gawande, MD)

[Video Interview](#) with NEJM study authors, Jennifer Temel, MD, and Victoria Jackson, MD, MPH
www.getpalliativecare.org

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(Excerpts adapted from AAHPM Media Tip Sheet and CAPC Media Toolkit, August 19, 2010)