Leading the way in palliative care

A RECENT STUDY in the New England Journal of Medicine (NEJM) found that lung cancer patients who received palliative care reported less depression, pain and other symptoms than patients who received aggressive medical care. What's more, the study showed that those who received palliative care lived longer, on average and enjoyed a higher quality of life.

At Hallmark Health System, members of the Palliative Care Consultation Service strive to alleviate pain and discomfort to improve the quality of life for patients dealing with these difficult life-limiting illnesses. The palliative care service uses a team consisting of a physician, nurse practitioner, social worker and chaplain who have specialized training in these challenging issues.

Maher Tabba, MD, medical director of the service, explains, "Our team is committed to improving the care of seriously ill patients, to relieve their suffering through pain and symptom management and to provide ongoing communication and coordination through the healthcare system. In addition, we work closely with the patient and their families to give them a better understanding of their choices for care."

The nurse practitioner for the program, Martha Quigley, MS, GNP-BC, CHPN, provides most consultations to patients and families. "The team works to ensure that patients and families receive the type of care they want so they gain a sense of control to make decisions that are consistent with their definition of quality of life," Quigley says.

The palliative team broadens the disease-model for medical treatments to include goals of enhancing the quality of life for the patient and family, optimizing function and addressing the psychological, emotional and spiritual needs of the patient and their families. "Concerns surrounding care needs on all these levels are addressed in a way which normalizes them, decreasing anxiety and bringing families together despite difficult circumstances," adds Anna Ventura, MSW, LICSW, palliative care clinical social worker.

For patients with life-limiting or progressive illness, referral criteria for palliative care consultations include pain, shortness of breath, agitation, etc. Treatment options may include aggressive care or less aggressive care dependent upon the patient's preferences.

Patients who choose Hallmark Health VNA and Hospice for home care have the added benefit of the continuum of care including palliative care VNA services at home. Hallmark Health VNA and Hospice has been consistently named to HomeCare Elite, a national compilation of top performing home health agencies across the country.



For more information

For more information on this service, visit www.hallmarkhealth.org and select "Medical Services."

Maher Tabba, MD, (I.), medical director of the program, Martha Quigley, MS, GNP-BC, CHPN and Anna Ventura, MSW, LICSW, discuss a palliative care case at Lawrence Memorial Hospital of Medford.

