



The Growth of Palliative Care in Hospitals

By Patrick A. Malone

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Paralleling the growth of the hospice industry, the number of hospital-based palliative care programs has more than doubled since 2000. According to a new survey by the Center to Advance Palliative Care, nearly **two-thirds of hospitals surveyed had palliative care teams**.

Palliative care focuses on easing the symptoms, stress and pain of serious illness, whether chronic or terminal. In the latter case, it often precedes hospice care, whose goal also is to alleviate suffering, but only for people who are terminally ill.

The report concludes that, thanks to the growing cost of treating an aging population and because it's simply more humane, palliative care should receive more financial support. The researchers say that previous studies conclusively demonstrated that many seriously ill patients suffer treatable pain and distress, and are financially devastated because of the high costs of medical care. Palliative care, they argue, offers a logical and patient-centered approach to improving medical care by focusing on quality of life and by matching to patient and family needs.

As reported by **Kaiser Health News**, unlike hospice services, palliative care programs are more common at nonprofit hospitals. That accounts for some stark geographic differences in the survey results – nonprofit hospitals are less common in the South.

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As described on WebMD, a Center to Advance Palliative Care [poll](#) showed that 9 in 10 people have no idea what palliative care is. But once it's explained to them, 9 in 10 say they would want it for themselves or for their loved ones.

But that requires a prescription – only a doctor, not the patient or relative – can request palliative care. And sometimes you must remind your doctors that you need to be treated as a whole patient, not a body part. If a doctor is focused on treating your tumor, he or she might not ask about your trouble sleeping, your skin rash, how exhausted your spouse is. But that's exactly the job of a palliative care professional.

Now, for the study's state-specific report card.

Regions where larger hospitals more were most likely to have palliative care teams:

- District of Columbia - 100%
- Vermont - 100%
- Maryland - 90%
- Nebraska - 93%
- Minnesota - 89%
- Oregon - 88%
- Rhode Island - 88%
- Washington - 83%

The District, which only has big hospitals, is the only jurisdiction where every hospital patient has access to palliative care.

States where hospitals were least likely to have palliative care teams:

- Kansas - 47%
- New Mexico - 44%
- Georgia - 43%
- Louisiana - 43%
- Texas - 42%
- Arkansas - 38%

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- Oklahoma - 30%
- Alaska - 29%
- Alabama - 28%
- Delaware - 20%
- Mississippi - 20%

If you or someone you love is planning a hospital visit with the potential for ongoing treatment, find out if the facility where you will be treated has a palliative care program. If not, consider the options within your health plan network, and if none offers a palliative care program, ask your insurance company why not.

And make sure your primary care doctor and your surgeon understands your interest in receiving such care.

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