

Palliative Care at a Glance

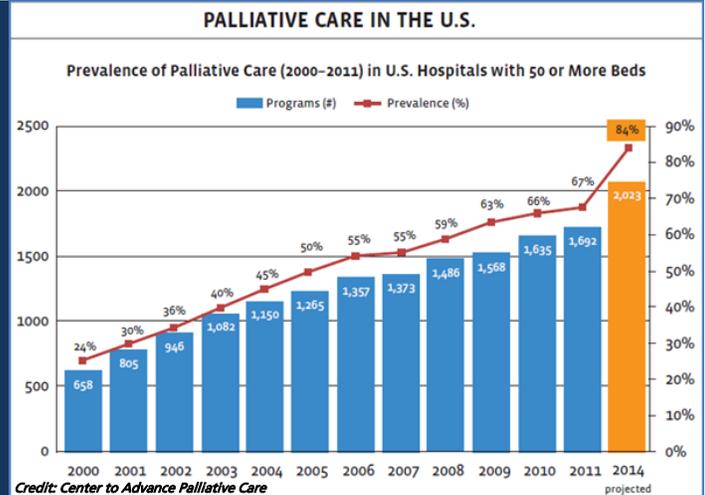
What is Palliative Care?

Palliative care is focused on providing patients with relief from the symptoms, pain, and stress of a serious illness. The goal is to improve quality of life for both the patient and the family. Palliative care is provided by a team of doctors, nurses, and other specialists who work with the patient's other doctors to provide an extra layer of support. Palliative care is appropriate at any age and at any stage in a serious illness and can be provided along with curative treatment to help patients get well faster and easier.

Growing Trend in Health Care

Over the last ten years, palliative care has been one of the fastest-growing trends in health care. The number of palliative care programs within hospital settings has increased by 138 percent, from more than 600 in 2000 to more than 1500 today.

This growth has occurred primarily in response to the growing number of Americans living with chronic and serious illness, and to the realities of caregiving faced by their families. But palliative care has also been embraced because it's really about giving patients more control. It's about including their family members and caregivers in the decisions they make about their treatment. It's about coordinating their doctors and medicines and making sure patients know what to do when they're discharged from the hospital. It's about making sure that their pain is properly managed, that psychosocial concerns are identified and treated, and that other symptoms such as nausea or shortness of breath are addressed. It is about all of the things that we should be doing to help patients get well and have better lives.



People Want Palliative Care

Palliative care is expected to increase as the public becomes more aware of its benefits. Recent public opinion research by the national polling firm Public Opinion Strategies reveals that even for those patients who are uninformed about palliative care, once they understand what it is, **92% report they would be highly likely to consider palliative care** for themselves or their families if they had a serious illness. **92% also said they believe patients should have access** to this type of care at hospitals nationwide.

Quality Care Leads to Cost Reduction

Today, approximately 90 million Americans are living with serious illness, and this number is expected to more than double over the next 25 years. About 20% of all Medicare beneficiaries have 5 or more chronic conditions, and two-thirds of Medicare spending goes to cover their care. This patient population is also the most likely to benefit from palliative care. Recent studies indicate that by closely matching treatments with a patient's goals, and improving their quality of life, palliative care can provide substantial cost reduction.

Policy Changes Would Help

ACS CAN has led initiatives to improve the lives of cancer patients by making treatment of their pain and other symptoms and coordination of their care standard protocol during their treatment for cancer. Studies have shown that coordinating patient care and treating pain and symptoms leads to increased patient and family satisfaction. The policy initiatives would address patient barriers to palliative care in two key areas by ensuring sufficient numbers of specialists to teach doctors and nurses to provide high quality palliative care, and by investing in research on ways to improve patient quality of life through palliative care.

