

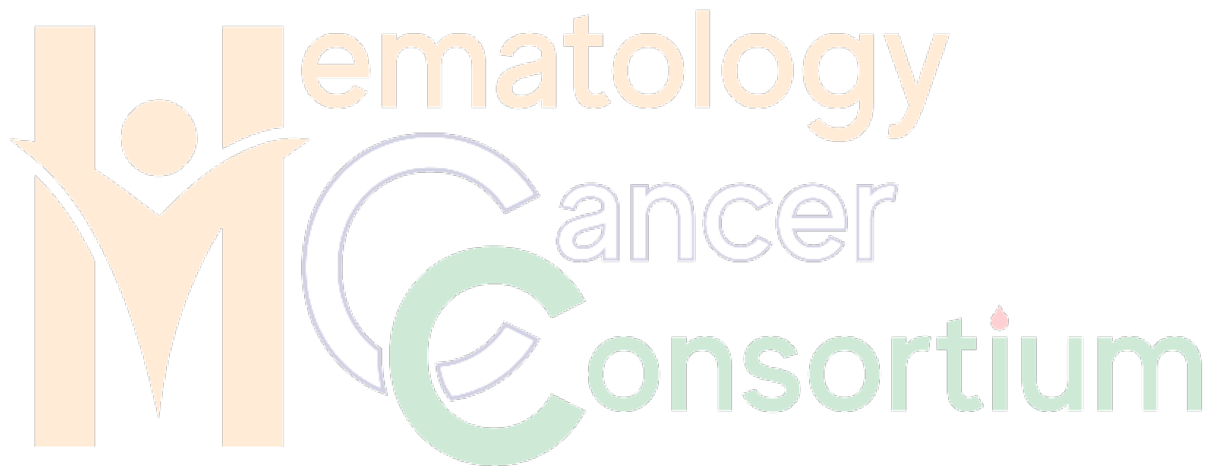


PALLIATIVE CARE

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- **What is palliative care?**

Palliative care involves the health care approach aimed to relieve the symptoms and stress associated with serious illness resulting in improvement of quality of life of patients and their families. Apart from symptom control palliative care is meant to address physical, psychological and spiritual issues related to any life-threatening illness. In patients with cancer, palliative care can be initiated at the time of diagnosis and can be continued along with disease directed and life prolonging therapies. Also, palliative care plays a key role in helping patients with autonomy, access to information and helps them make choices. Palliative care becomes the focus of care in patients who no longer benefit from cancer directed therapies.

- **Who needs palliative care? Do I need palliative care?**

Any patient with serious illness can benefit from palliative care. There is a common misconception that palliative care is same as “end of life care” but it is not. Studies clearly showed that early integration of palliative care with cancer treatment results in better outcomes in many cancers. So, all patients with a diagnosis of cancer can have benefits from palliative care. Studies have shown that patients with hematologic cancers do not avail palliative care services to the same extent as solid cancers. Majority of the hematological cancers are characterized by high symptom burden and prolonged and intensive treatment making these patients ideal candidates to receive palliative care.

- **Who can provide palliative care?**

Palliative care will be usually initiated by the hematologist/ hemato-oncologist treating the patient. But the optimal delivery of palliative care may need a multidisciplinary approach involving a dedicated palliative care team working in co-ordination with the hematologist/hemato-oncologist. This team usually will have a palliative care physician, trained nurses and other supportive staff.

- **Are there any specific concerns in palliative care particular to patients with hematologic cancers?**

Patients with hematologic cancers do not experience pain to the same extent that patients with solid cancers do. Rather complications due to low blood counts, such as low hemoglobin leading to excessive fatigue, bleeding due to low platelets etc are more common. This may require blood transfusions to alleviate symptoms and improve quality of life.

- **In what all aspects palliative care can be of help?**

- **Physical aspects:** One of the important aims of palliative care is to control the symptoms related to cancer or sometimes its treatment. Alleviation of such symptoms

through appropriate medications or other measures will help to improve patients' physical well-being and ultimately the quality of life.

Common symptoms that can be addressed through palliative care support include

- Pain
 - Nausea and Vomiting
 - Shortness of breath or air hunger
 - Constipation
 - Diarrhea
 - Fatigue
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- **Social aspects:** Palliative care services may be able to identify the social needs of the patients and care givers and provide necessary support. This may include providing certain services at home, provision of equipment, access to transportation and attempts to address financial issues.
 - **Psychological and Emotional aspects:** Diagnosis of cancer itself can be very disturbing to most of the patients. In case of hematological cancers, intensive treatment and its adverse events can be even more distressing. Many of the patients can have anxiety, depression, denial and adjustment problems. Palliative care team can help the patient cope up with their disease and the fight against it. A clinical social worker or a psycho-oncologist working with the palliative care team can play a pivotal role in this.
 - **Spiritual Aspects:** Spiritual well-being is considered as an important component of health. Many of the patients receiving treatment for cancer also undergo spiritual struggles and will have concerns on meaning of life, existence, and spiritual beliefs. Addressing these issues adequately can improve the quality of life of these patients. A dedicated palliative care team will be able to discuss these aspects with the patients and families and give them necessary guidance.
 - **End of Life Care:** Some patients with advanced cancers may reach a stage where they cease to get benefit from any anticancer treatment. For such patients nearing death, a comfort focused care is provided by the palliative care team. They take care of the increased anxiety and new symptoms of the patients and helps the caregivers to cope up with the situation. There are community and home-based palliative care services which can be helpful in such situations. Also, in patients with prognosis less than 6 months hospice-based care also can be arranged by the multidisciplinary palliative care team. Hospice care which also provides comprehensive comfort-based care, can be done at patient's home or at separate facilities designed for this purpose

- **How can I avail palliative care services?**

Most of the major hospital treating hematological cancers will have a dedicated palliative care team, who can inpatient and outpatient services to the patient from the beginning. Also, there may be separate palliative care services who can provide community based or home-based care. A list of palliative care services available in different states with contact details are given at the end of the document. Also same can be accessed from the link <https://www.palliativecare.in/>

