

Essential Skills and Supports for All Clinicians Treating Serious Illness

INFORMATION FOR CLINICAL PARTNERS

What is palliative care? What palliative care should all clinicians be able to provide?

Palliative care focuses on improving quality of life for people with serious illness and their families through high-quality communication, advance care planning, symptom management, and emotional and spiritual support. While palliative care specialists can support clinicians in other specialty areas to provide the highest quality of care to seriously ill patients, all clinicians who treat serious illness should be able to:

- ▶ Have honest and sensitive discussions about serious illness, including delivering difficult news, discussing goals of care, and helping patients communicate their wishes
- ▶ Assess and manage common physical and psychological symptoms such as pain, nausea, shortness of breath, anxiety, and depression

What are the benefits of incorporating palliative care into routine practice?

As evidenced by the endorsement by many professional societies (for example, American College of Surgeons, American Society of Clinical Oncologists, American College of Cardiology), palliative care is an essential part of providing high-quality care to seriously ill patients. The California Health Care Foundation funded initiatives in nine public health systems to support partnerships between palliative care and partner service lines. Some key outcomes included improvements in these areas:

Confidence and Comfort	<i>At Alameda Health System, the percentage of emergency medicine residents who felt uncomfortable leading code status discussions dropped from 40% to 0%.</i>
Knowledge and Skills	<i>At LAC+USC Medical Center, radiation oncology residents improved in 12 of 16 areas related to pain assessments.</i>
Efficiency and Uptake	<i>The primary care practices at Contra Costa Health System incorporated advance care planning (ACP) status into the standard care gaps dashboard in their EHR, and saw a sixfold increase in ACP activity.</i>
Patient Care	<i>At Olive View-UCLA Medical Center, 76% of oncology patients who screened positive for pain saw an improvement in pain scores in subsequent visits.</i>

How can palliative care specialists help?

- ▶ **Partner on a needs assessment** to identify opportunities for improvement for patients in your service line.
- ▶ Identify educational resources to train your staff and identify tools to improve routine care.
- ▶ Provide input on the design and implementation of quality improvement interventions, including project metrics and measurement and navigating around challenges.

“Serious illness conversations are a journey you have with a patient . . . that understanding only came with palliative care guidance”

What are the next steps?

- ▶ Reach out to your palliative care specialists to inquire about a partnership.
- ▶ **Do an assessment** to identify specific needs for your patients or your practice staff.
- ▶ **Read project profiles** describing successful palliative care partnerships with a variety of partner service lines.

— Nephrology physician,
CHCF Generalist Palliative Care