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Introduction

Facilitating informed decision-making: A key component of palliative care is ensuring that patients and their families are fully informed and able to make decisions that align with their values and preferences. This involves providing clear, honest information about the patient's condition, prognosis, and the benefits and risks of various treatment options. Healthcare providers should engage in shared decision-making, where they collaborate with patients and families to reach a mutually agreed-upon plan of care. This process is often supported by decision aids, which help patients understand their options and the consequences of each choice. Additionally, addressing patient and caregiver concerns, fears, and uncertainties is essential for facilitating informed decision-making.

Not synonymous with end-of-life care

While palliative care is often associated with end-of-life care, it is not synonymous with it. Palliative care can be provided at any stage of a serious illness, from diagnosis to death. Its focus is on relieving suffering and improving the quality of life, rather than solely on preparing for death. End-of-life care, on the other hand, specifically refers to the care provided in the final stages of a patient's life, often in a hospice or palliative care unit. This care focuses on comfort, dignity, and the fulfillment of the patient's wishes during their final days. The two concepts overlap significantly, but palliative care encompasses a broader range of services and goals.

End-of-life preferences: Understanding and respecting a patient's end-of-life preferences is a central goal of palliative care. Patients should be encouraged to discuss their wishes regarding life-sustaining treatments, such as mechanical ventilation, dialysis, and artificial nutrition and hydration. These discussions should be facilitated through advance care planning, which includes the completion of advance directives, such as living wills and durable power of attorney for healthcare. Healthcare providers should ensure that these preferences are clearly documented and communicated to all members of the care team. Regular reassessment of preferences is also important, as a patient's wishes may change over time. Finally, ensuring that the care team is aware of and follows the patient's preferences is crucial for providing care that is truly patient-centered.

