



Palliative Care in a Pandemic

RESEARCH ARTICLE
OPEN ACCESS
PUBLISHED 11/11/2021

palliate is “to reduce the intensity or severity of (a disease)”; the word’s second, more restricted meaning is “to ease (symptoms) without curing the underlying disease. The distinction between these two meanings is important—particularly, as we shall see, in the context of contagion. Unfortunately, palliative care’s relatively recent association with hospice has led both the general public and many health care providers to narrowly view palliative care as non-curative end-of-life care. As a result of this

Citation:

can be surmised that many patients, with diverse diagnoses, do not receive a palliative care consultation but would benefit from it.

Citation:

Citation:

in the first person's acquiring the second person's infection (Blevins & Bronze, 2010).

can easily become infected. For patients with a chronic progressive disease such as those mentioned above, and also for many patients with acute illness, a new contagion may present an additional serious threat. Moreover, that viral threat may be greatly magnified for individuals living in a closed environment such as a skilled nursing facility or other institutional setting. A consideration of the potential impact of a rampant contagion leads to startling conclusions. Patients who already have elevated risk for infection, poor endurance, reduced appetite, and elevated need for physical care—and who then contract a viral contagion—can realistically become very ill, requiring hospitalization, or even die. For these patients, palliative care could reduce the incidence of environmental exposure to a virus and to subsequent infections (e.g., pneumonia, sepsis).

Patients in Nursing Homes

Today, 1.4 million Americans reside in 15,700 nursing homes, and 85% of these nursing home residents are older adults (Stone, 2019). Furthermore, this percentage of older adults in nursing homes is expected to rise as America's older adult age group increases. For these adults, the introduction of a contagion into their nursing homes can result in a devastating loss of life—as witnessed during the current COVID-19 pandemic. Palliative care offers the ability to visit these people in their nursing homes when they may be required to remain there. This mandate can result in nursing home residents' missing their routine physician visits. Depending on the disease state, lack of assessment can lead to worsening of symptoms [7].

Older Age and Health in the Context of Viral Infection

In comparison with the world's population as a whole, America's population is collectively older: in 2019, older adults constituted 16% of the U.S. population; in comparison, the older adult population constituted only 9% of the world's total population (World Bank Group, 2019). Many American older adults are diagnosed with chronic diseases or may have suffered an acute event. As an individual patient's chronic disease progressively worsens over time, the patient requires more assistance. During a viral pandemic, the protection of older adults with chronic or acute disease is critical for mitigating the elevated potential for loss of life.

Pandemic-related Challenges for Patients

Emotional Impact: The isolation and overall fear of infection during a pandemic affects the emotional health of the individual (Soysal, Aydin, Isik, 2020). This is seen in the rising suicide rates in the general, healthy public as well as those with chronic illness (Jurblem, Ng, Castle, 2020). Chronic illness, by itself, can increase the risk of infection (Wang, Li, Wan, 2020). Forced isolation prevents normal access to social, religious, and family contact. People who live in nursing homes have felt this emotional isolation acutely (CITATION). They have not been able to visit with friends and family members as they had in the past. In many cases, these individuals are confined to their rooms for safety and as a result are very lonely (CITATION). Visits to medical appointments may be via telemedicine. With stringent infection control protocols, PCs can visit to monitor changes in health status while providing emotional support (Soysal, Aydin, Isik, 2020).

Economic Impact

With the recent COVID-19 pandemic have come the well-publicized curtailment or closure of businesses, adverse impacts on entire industries, and accompanying constraints on the economy as a whole and on individuals' employment and financial well-being; as a consequence, a large proportion of the nation's population has been

struggling (CITATION). Some may have found themselves needing to move in with other family members to conserve funds. This would be anticipated to have an economic impact on all parties involved. A loss of income by one or more members of a family can exert strain on other members of the household, especially those who were already living on a limited budget. For patients who are adversely affected by pandemic-caused financial loss, palliative care visiting by a social worker can include identification of available community resources and other avenues for help. This can include heat assistance, food,

Cancer. As a result of having cancer and consequent ancer

Citation:

Recommendations for the General Public

A commonsense approach for wellness is essential. When a threat