Rural Community-Based Palliative Care Program

Elements of Consultation

Consultation in palliative care addresses:

- Assessment and management of pain and other physical and psychosocial symptoms (symptoms are assessed and recommendation for management of pain, dyspnea, fatigue, nausea, constipation, anxiety, depression, delirium, insomnia, general well being)
- Estimating prognosis
- Assisting in identifying goals of care (Surrogate decision maker, code status, advance directive content)
- Assessment of support system and coping abilities
- Assessment of spiritual needs
- Anticipatory guidance for future decisions

Case Example

ES is an 89 year old retired school teacher who was admitted to the ICU from the emergency room five days ago with worsening shortness of breath. She has a complicated medical history and has been hospitalized three times in the last six months. During her hospitalization, she became unresponsive, septic, and is now in renal failure. Her family tells the primary physicians that they would like “everything done.”

The primary physician requests a palliative care consultation to assist with goals of care and the patient’s delirium. The team meets with the patient’s sister and two adult children. A third child who lives in California is linked in via conference phone. The team asks the family to describe who the patient is - what is important to her, what her goals and values are. The family describes their hopes and wishes. The palliative care team reviews what has happened in the hospital, ES’s current chance of recovery and the trajectory of the last six months. The family’s questions about her diagnosis and potential for recovery were addressed. The palliative care team described how the delirium could be managed and decisions that would need to be made about her care outside of the hospital. Both social work and chaplaincy helped the family process this news and helped identify additional resources within the family and community. The next day the patient was discharged with hospice and died comfortably.

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