

10 MYTHS ABOUT PALLIATIVE CARE

Palliative care is still widely misunderstood by many Canadians.

Here are 10 common myths we often encounter:

MYTH 1: Palliative Care is most appropriate for patients who will likely die within weeks.



FACT: Palliative care is often described as “supportive care”. A palliative approach means focusing holistically on physical, psychological, social and spiritual care to improve quality of life whether that is weeks, months or years.

MYTH 2: Pain is a part of dying.



FACT: Pain is not always a part of dying. If pain is experienced near end of life, there are many ways it can be managed.

MYTH 3: Treatment stops when palliative care starts.



FACT: Palliative care can begin at the time of diagnosis of a life-limiting illness and coexist along with active treatment.

MYTH 4: Palliative care speeds up the process of dying.



FACT: Palliative care does not speed up the process of dying. It provides comfort and the best quality of life from diagnosis of an advanced illness until end of life.

MYTH 5: Raising the topic of palliative care with patients and caregivers robs them of hope.



FACT: Palliative care ensures the best quality of life for those who have been diagnosed with an advanced illness. Hope becomes less about cure and more about living life as fully as possible.

MYTH 6: Taking pain medications in palliative care leads to addiction.



FACT: Well-controlled pain is important throughout an illness. Keeping people comfortable often requires increased doses of pain medication. This is a result of tolerance to medication as the body adjusts, not addiction.

MYTH 7: Palliative care is only provided in a hospital.



FACT: In many cases palliative care can be provided wherever the patient lives – home, long-term care facility, hospice or hospital. Sometimes the needs of the patient exceed what can be provided at home despite best efforts.

MYTH 8: Morphine is given to speed up the process of dying.



FACT: Appropriate doses of morphine keep patients comfortable but do not speed up the process of dying.

MYTH 9: Palliative care is only for people dying of cancer.



FACT: Palliative care can benefit patients and their families from the time of diagnosis of any life-limiting illness.

MYTH 10: People in palliative care who stop eating die of starvation.



FACT: People with advanced illnesses don't experience hunger or thirst as healthy people do. People who stop eating die of their illness, not starvation.