



Palliative care places patients at the centre

Description

For many, there comes a time when life-limiting illnesses mean crucial healthcare decisions must be made. While some turn to hospice, palliative care is an option that can improve quality of life much sooner.

None of us are exempt from facing a terminal illness or the inevitable effects of ageing. Despite our optimism about the power of modern medicine to conquer all diseases, there comes a point when we need to confront the reality of our own mortality.

Dr Jenni Noble, Head of Oncology at Medscheme, describes palliative care as an approach that focuses on coordinating care, providing relief from symptoms, and improving the quality of life for individuals with serious illnesses. “While palliative care is often associated with end-of-life or terminal care, it is increasingly recognised as being beneficial at earlier stages of life-limiting illness, even when a person is not yet dying,” says Dr Jenni.

Addressing the symptoms

“Palliative care can be administered alongside active treatments and is applicable at any stage of a life-limiting disease. It is frequently provided by an integrated multidisciplinary team of healthcare workers, often including a nurse, a social worker and a doctor,” she says.

The goal is to enable individuals to engage in daily activities and experience the best possible quality of life. Unlike aggressive curative treatments, palliative care recognises the importance of optimising the overall life experience within the limitations imposed by illness.

In addition to managing symptoms, the emotional support provided by a palliative care team is vital. When facing a serious illness, patients and their loved ones are often overwhelmed. “Palliative care teams are specifically trained to communicate effectively, demonstrating compassion and empathy. They create a safe environment where individuals can openly express their fears, concerns and emotions. The team actively listens to their needs and preferences, recognising the importance of providing a supportive space during this challenging journey,” Dr Jenni adds.

Giving the best advice

A palliative team can help you understand the different treatment options available. This involves discussions about what matters most to you as individual and what you would like to happen when you cannot advocate for yourself. “This process is grounded in shared decision-making, ensuring that a person’s values and preferences guide medical interventions.”

By addressing symptoms, managing side effects of treatment and providing support, palliative care can facilitate the effectiveness of your medical treatments and interventions.

The goal of any palliative care team is to reduce hospitalisations and enable the patient to remain at home, surrounded by loved ones, in a familiar environment.

“Palliative care strives to minimise disruptions to your life, allowing you to maintain your daily routine and activities,” Dr Jenni says. “Medscheme advances the understanding and delivery of palliative care, encouraging its availability to members of the medical schemes in our portfolio. Our mission is to foster innovation, quality improvement, and evidence-based practice in palliative care.”

Category

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