

# Terminology Concerning Palliative Care and End-of-Life Care

Darrell Owens, RN, PhD  
Harborview Medical Center

*\*Palliative care is more than just the withdrawal of life support\**

**Palliative Care:** The goal of palliative care is to prevent and relieve suffering and to support the best possible quality of life for patients and their families, regardless of the stage of disease or the need for other therapies. Palliative care is both a philosophy of care and an organized, highly structured system for delivering care. Palliative care expands traditional disease-model medical treatments to include the goals of enhancing quality of life for patient and family, optimizing function, helping with decision-making and providing opportunities for personal growth. As such, it can be delivered concurrently with life-prolonging care or as the main focus of care

**End of Life Care:** Care focused on the needs of the person regarding the end of his/her life.

**Terminal:** A disease or condition for which there is no cure and no treatments that will result in long-term stability. The prognosis is short and generally well defined, although there is no specific time period associated with use of this term.

**Hospice Care:** A program providing comprehensive care to terminally ill patients having a medical prognosis that his or her life expectancy is 6 months or less. (The arbitrary 6-month cut off is based on Medicare Hospice benefit eligibility).

**Life Limiting Illness:** The term is used for anyone that has an illness that will eventually take his or her life. There is no time period attached.

**Comfort Care/Comfort Measures Only:** There is not a national consensus on the meaning of this term. At HMC "comfort care" means we are using a standard comfort care order set. (Other settings may not have this). In this setting, comfort care is an active treatment plan that guides the health care team in end of life care when decisions have been made to withhold and withdraw life-sustaining treatment, not to resuscitate in the event of a cardiac or respiratory arrest, and to pursue only those treatments that provide comfort. "Comfort measures only" is a better term than "comfort care" since all patients want their care to be comfortable.

**Bereavement Care:** Care provided to patients and families while grieving. This includes anticipatory grieving prior to death as well as grieving after death.

*Last update: February 25, 2005/DO*

© 2005 UW GIM