Northern Health Palliative Care

A Palliative Approach to Care: The Role of Personal Support Workers in Integrating a Palliative Approach

Personal Support Workers (PSWs) are often with patients and families for longer periods and more frequently than any other member of the team. Many people refer to PSWs as the eyes and ears. As a patient declines, PSWs may observe unique care needs as well as subtle or sudden changes in their condition. It is important for Personal Support Workers to identify when and how to integrate a palliative approach.

Integrating a Palliative Approach for Personal Support Workers

Ask the Surprise Question: "Would I be surprised if this person died in the next 12 months?"
Asking yourself this question will help you to identify patients who may benefit from palliative care.

Support Dignity
Patients and families may share thoughts, concerns, fears, hopes and wishes with you. You can support a patient's dignity by helping to develop a care plan that is tailored to the expressed wishes of the patient and family.

Advocate for Care Needs
When a patient or family member has shared thoughts about goals of care, you can advocate on their behalf to address an unmet care need or speak up when treatment options are in opposition to the expressed wishes of the person.

Assist in Increasing Physical Comfort
When you identify that a patient is not comfortable, gather information regarding the discomfort. Record and report your findings and then implement comfort measures as appropriate.

Communicate and Collaborate
Lastly, communicate your findings and collaborate with the multidisciplinary team to develop a care plan and ensure the patient's goals and wishes are being met.

If you are a PSW or Care Aide interested in learning more about palliative care, please email Palliative.Care.Consult.Team@northernhealth.ca for more information on our upcoming 12 week self-directed online course – "Integrating a Palliative Approach: Essentials for Personal Support Workers".

Reference:
Murray, K. (2020). *Integrating a Palliative Approach: Essentials for Personal Support Workers Second Edition*. Victoria, Canada: Life and Death Matters

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