

Donor Impact Report: Palliative Care

What is palliative care?

Patients who are living with serious illnesses may be referred by their primary physicians to the outpatient palliative care program. Our palliative care team includes doctors, a nurse practitioner, social workers and chaplains. They work with patients and families on pain and symptom management, treatment decisions, identifying and accessing resources and other challenges. Each patient's care plan is built around their needs, wishes and values.

"Palliative care helps patients define what 'quality of life' means to them, and then live out the remainder of their lives with that in mind," says Annie Perry, MSW, LICSW, the program's social worker.

Your support enables Overlake to offer palliative care services to patients in and out of the hospital. In 2019, with your help, nearly 700 patients and families benefited from the compassionate services of the palliative care team.

"I felt so much better!"

When the palliative care team met Barbara, a 90-year-old woman receiving dialysis for advanced kidney disease, they learned that Barbara did not fully understand the role of the dialysis in her treatment. During the discussion, the team helped Barbara and her daughter understand what to expect with advanced kidney disease, what symptoms might worsen despite dialysis and what was likely to happen next.

Social worker Annie Perry, along with Dr. Jane Yeh, helped Barbara complete a Provider Orders for Life-Sustaining Treatment (POLST) form. The process enabled her to think about and document which types of life-sustaining treatments she would like to have and under what circumstances.

Barbara's daughter expressed gratitude for the palliative care assistance, saying that the detailed conversation was enlightening, helped them better understand their options, and helped to relieve the anxiety and confusion she and Barbara were experiencing. "I felt like visiting with Dr. Yeh and the social worker was just a missing piece of the care team puzzle...I felt so much better after that meeting!"



Annie Perry (left) is a social worker serving patients in the outpatient palliative care program. Dr. Karen Knops (right) serves as medical director of the program.

You make a difference

Social workers play critical roles in the palliative care program, often meeting with patients and families multiple times over the course of an illness. The services they provide are free of charge to patients. Your contributions make that possible. "I get to really know the patients and their families," says Annie. "I'm so grateful for the donors whose contributions allow me to continue to do the work I am so passionate about."