



# angels grace

## — HOSPICE —

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## Most Adults Are Unaware of Palliative Care and How It Can Improve Quality of Life

**P**alliative care (pronounced *pal-lee-uh-tiv*) can improve quality of life for patients with a serious illness and provide much-needed support to family members.

However, the majority of adults in America are not aware of nor do they understand the goals and benefits of palliative care.

An estimated 71% of U.S. adults reported having never heard the term “palliative care,” according to a study in the *Journal of Palliative Medicine*.

Some patients and families are aware of palliative care but mistakenly attach a stigma to it, associating this specialized medical care with a likelihood of death. Many Americans with a serious illness who could be receiving palliative care are not actively dying.

Despite the challenges of raising awareness about palliative care, many in the healthcare industry believe this comprehensive medical care is poised for growth. Today, palliative care teams are available for home visits in many communities through local hospices. Palliative care is also available in most hospitals, and it is growing quickly in outpatient clinics across the U.S.

Within the next two decades, palliative care has the potential to reduce national healthcare costs by \$103 billion, according to the nonprofit economic research group Florida TaxWatch. Experts estimate that palliative care could reduce healthcare costs by more than \$4,000 per patient.

### A Comforting Option

Palliative care is specialized medical care that focuses on improving quality of life by alleviating the symptoms of a serious or life-threatening illness and reducing psychosocial



distress. It provides support on several levels: physical, emotional, social, and spiritual.

Palliative care is provided by a specially trained team of doctors, nurses, and other specialists who work together with a patient’s other doctors to provide an extra layer of support. It is appropriate at any age and at any stage in a serious illness. It can be provided along with curative treatment.

A palliative care team can help you and your loved ones understand what to expect from the illness and how to prepare for the future. They will take the time to ask about your goals, and they will coordinate treatment options that honor your choices and preferences.

The palliative care team will also give you care tips to help you manage some physical and emotional needs on your own, connecting you to resources as needed.

To learn more, ask us about available palliative care services or visit [www.getpalliativecare.org](http://www.getpalliativecare.org) (Center to Advance Palliative Care).

# Social Connection May Have a Direct Impact on Your Health

## Broken-Heart Syndrome

Experts say the emotional devastation of losing a life partner, child, close friend, or even a beloved pet can take a toll, sometimes even causing a potentially fatal condition, commonly known as “broken-heart syndrome.”

A study published in the *Journals of Gerontology* found that the death of a spouse raises a person’s risk of dying by around 30%, compared to those who are still married. Some research has shown that in the six months after the death of a spouse, the bereaved face odds of mortality 40–70% greater than the general public, according to the American Psychological Association.

“The brain has a system in it to deal with acute, serious, life-threatening stress,” explains Dr. Martin Samuels, Chair of Neurology at Brigham and Women’s Hospital in Boston. With broken-heart syndrome, the stress is so great that chemicals affect the heart so it fails to contract normally, which leads to decreased blood flow.

Be sure to see your doctor if you think you have symptoms of broken-heart syndrome. Doctors advise that learning stress management and relaxation techniques can be helpful in improving both psychological and physical health. In some cases, heart medication may be prescribed.

Self-care is important, too, so consider spending time with your closest friends and maintaining an exercise routine, such as taking a walk each day.

## The Loneliness Epidemic

Four surveys in the past year (conducted by Cigna, AARP, the Kaiser Family Foundation, and the University of Michigan) have examined the extent of loneliness in older adults. In fact, 42.6

million adults experience isolation each day, and the lack of social relationships is as much a risk factor for death as smoking or obesity, according to the American Seniors Housing Association.

When patients say that they are lonely, what they really want are close relationships with people they care about, satisfying social roles, and a sense that their lives have value.

“Assuaging loneliness is not just about having random human contact; it’s about the quality of that contact,” says Vyjeyanthi Periyakoil, MD, Associate Professor of Medicine at Stanford University School of Medicine. Different approaches need to strategically address the root cause, type and degree of withdrawal.

Health insurers and social service

agencies are focusing on various initiatives that bring meaning and purpose to older adults’ lives. Some are screening for loneliness and introducing at-risk patients to a “chief togetherness officer” who shows they care, while others arrange informal social hubs at clinics to foster connections and build bonds.

How often do you lack satisfying companionship? Whether it’s face-to-face time with family and friends, group activities, volunteering, or religious affiliation, there are resources and reasons to reach out and expand your world.

Are you or a loved one struggling with isolation? Take the AARP Foundation assessment at [www.connect2affect.org/assessment/how-connected-are-you/](http://www.connect2affect.org/assessment/how-connected-are-you/).



Some people mistakenly think hospice care is just about dying...nothing could be further from the truth. Hospice helps patients and families focus on living. Angels Grace Hospice, LLC, brings comfort, dignity and peace to help people with a life-limiting illness live every moment of life to the fullest. We also provide support for family and friends.

We are licensed in the state of Illinois, Medicare Certified, Joint Commission Accredited and are locally owned and operated by experienced professionals dedicated to providing excellent end-of-life care for Will, Cook, DuPage, Kendall, Grundy, and Kane counties. Please contact us for more information.

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*To comfort always... this is our work*

