



LIVING WELL: Understanding palliative care vs. hospice

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best at outlining options for people. When dealing with health issues, it's imperative that people advocate for their own health choices, or have someone who can do so on their behalf.

First, knowing what medical terminology actually means is vital to making good choices. That includes dismissing myths and demystifying false assumptions associated with terms like palliative care and hospice. Again, all too often people wait too long to take advantage of services because they misunderstand what those services actually are and when they can be best accessed.

Most important: one doesn't have to wait until their final week or days of life to choose palliative or hospice care. Yet, that's precisely what happens for so many. And sometimes it's not the patient delaying that choice but instead, the family who "isn't ready" to select that option. But is that the best thing to do?

Knowing what palliative care is, how it differs from hospice, and when each option is best utilized, helps people make informed decisions and choices. So let's get right to defining the options available.

Palliative care offers pain and symptom management dependent on a



"end of life care" may cause people to shy away from hospice or delay opting for it until the last moments. Some may see choosing hospice as "throwing in the towel" or giving up hope. But hospice is far from that. Its goal is to provide the best quality of life for as long as possible. A holistic form of comfort care, hospice also focuses on the physical, emotional and spiritual well-being of the patient, as well as provides a supportive network for that person's family and loved ones. The objective is to fulfill the wishes of the patient while managing pain and symptoms with quality and expert medical care.

Far from giving up or throwing in the towel, both palliative care and hospice give people options for maintaining control of their lives and how they live.

Living Well is a monthly column provided by Joan F. Wright on behalf of the NVNA & Hospice. Wright is a Certified Dementia Practitioner with NVNA and Hospice, a non-profit home healthcare and hospice agency serving over 25 communities on the South Shore from Milton to Plymouth. For information call 781-659-2342 or visit www.nvna.org.

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