

Palliative Care - A Noble and Holistic Specialty

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Opinion

A patient's suffering from any illness is 'total' combining the physical with the emotional. The entire human being is involved in this process. This process is even more acutely experienced by the patient with an incurable, terminal illness for example cancer or an organ failure. Yet, traditionally physicians have considered the physical domain more importantly over the psychological domain. Sadly in the Cartesian dualism, body and mind were considered as separate entities and yet they are inter-twinned [1].

Palliative care embraces the golden principle of maximizing quality of life and offering comfort and dignity in the dying stage of the patient [2]. It aims to provide expert symptom management coupled with empathy in caring. The patient's relatives are taken into consideration in the entire care process and in the patient's illness trajectory [3,4].

Palliative care integrates with other specialties, most notably with oncology in the care of patients with cancer. For best patient management, there should be early integration between these two specialties [5]. It is well recognised that excellent pain relief enables the patient to receive oncological care more effectively.

Psychological care of the patient with breast cancer can positively impact on their survival [6]. Again there is benefit shown with psychotherapy in the context of patients with gastro-intestinal malignancy [7].

Palliative care therefor is truly 'holistic' looking at the entire human being with its physical, emotional, spiritual and social domains. It is provided by a multi-disciplinary team of care professionals. The word 'holistic' is derived from the word 'holy' thus making it also noble.

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