Providing Palliative Care in the Ambulatory Care Setting

Jane Griffith, MSN, RN, GNP, CHPN, Jason A. Lyman, MD, MS, and Leslie J. Blackhall, MD, MTS

Palliative care that provides specialized attention to pain and symptom management is important for patients with cancer. Palliative care aims to reduce pain and other symptoms through an interdisciplinary approach involving physicians, nurses, social workers, and other members of the healthcare team. Families are included in care planning. Patients and families benefit from the availability of palliative care services early in the disease process, particularly when symptoms impact quality of life. One way to implement early palliative interventions is the establishment of an ambulatory care clinic dedicated to palliative care. This article describes the experience of an outpatient palliative care clinic at a large teaching hospital by using case studies to highlight the benefits of ambulatory palliative care and concluding with recommendations for research.

At a Glance

- The goal of palliative care is to relieve pain and other symptoms by using an interdisciplinary approach that addresses the physical, psychosocial, and spiritual aspects of patient care.
- Patients can receive timely, appropriate interventions for distressing symptoms in the ambulatory setting, thus improving quality of life.
- Frequent follow-up by telephone can ensure that recommended interventions are effective and help minimize burdensome side effects.

Literature Review

Various models of palliative care exist. The Center to Advance Palliative Care (2010) provides valuable leadership for the development of palliative care programs. Many hospitals have developed palliative care consult services that facilitate symptom management and end-of-life decision making with attention to goals of care. Some hospitals have designated palliative care units...