

# Palliative Care: Physical Comfort

Angela Valerio and her mother, Camelia, are very close. They've been living together since Angela was diagnosed with a rare and painful condition six years ago.

*"I am her only daughter and she'll say, you know, she wishes it was her. And I understand, I'm a parent, myself- I wouldn't want my kids to go through none of this, at ALL - never."*

What Angela is 'going through' is treatment for what's known as a Desmoid Tumor, in her right leg. The pills she now takes are one of six types of Chemotherapy she's been on to prevent the tumor from spreading to nearby areas. Angela says the side effects of the treatment, and the physical symptoms of her tumor, can be debilitating.

*"Headaches, nausea, vomiting, loss of appetite, bone aching, body aching, and - I have to say - the bone aching is the worst."*

Three years into her treatment, Angela's pain got so bad that her Oncologist decided she needed additional help. He referred Angela for Palliative Care.

*"The best way to think about Palliative Care is as an 'added layer of support' for people living with a serious illness, and their family."*

Palliative Care is specialized medical treatment, focused on providing relief from the pain, symptoms, and stress of a severe condition and its treatment. A core Palliative Care Team is "Multidisciplinary" - it typically includes a doctor, a nurse, and a social worker.

*"What's unique about Palliative Care is its deliberate focus on the whole person. It can mean everything from listening to you tell us what your hopes for the future are and what your fears and worries for the future are, all the way to answering the phone at three in the morning, if you wake up in a pain crisis."*

*"I'm feeling a little lethargic."*

A primary goal of Palliative Care is your physical comfort. After an initial assessment of symptoms and side effects, the team develops a treatment plan to manage issues such as: Pain; Shortness of breath; Nausea and vomiting; Fatigue; Insomnia; Loss of appetite; and Constipation. The team may also address other issues, like confusion or disorientation; depression and anxiety.

*"I always tell patients that there is no need to suffer, that physical symptoms can be addressed and managed, while someone's receiving treatment."*

*"We are here to support you."*

Palliative Care is "Patient-Centered" care. That means you have a role to play to tell the team about all your symptoms and side effects and how they impact your daily life. The more the team knows, the more effective their care can be.

*"I will always speak up and tell them something isn't working, or if I don't like how it feels, you know, I'm always gonna tell them. There's no problem with that."*

As Angela has learned, it's important to update your team regularly on how you are feeling. They will also do a new assessment of your symptoms each time you visit. It's important to keep track of how you are feeling in

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between appointments and to tell them about new symptoms, as well as changes in the ones they are already treating.

*“If I’m really sick, I’ll call them, and I’ll tell them like what’s going on, and they’ll call me like every hour. That’s the type of relationship that we have.”*

*“Science shows that people who receive Palliative Care at the same time as their disease treatment - feel better, have fewer crises, are much less likely to end up in an emergency or crisis situation. There are even some studies showing that people who get Palliative Care live longer, then people with the same diseases who don’t get it.”*

For Angela, Palliative Care means less pain and more opportunity to enjoy being with those who matter most to her.

*“Working with the team has definitely improved my quality of life, because I’m able to spend more time with my mom and my kids. It’s wonderful.”*