

PALLIATIVE CARE: A PHYSICIAN'S PERSPECTIVE

As a physician, what does palliative care mean to me? I can sum it up in one word: Hope. We all have patients that we can't "fix," that we cannot make whole or healthy. Every day we see them. Our inability to cure them gnaws at our psyches, leading to self-doubt and burn-out. It also changes the relationship with our patients as we slowly distance ourselves to better control our own emotions when the inevitable happens. It's only natural to do this since we need to conserve some emotional energy to get through the rest of a very busy day.

Palliative care, however, holds out the hope that their lives can be better. As physicians, we concentrate on physical healing, and we do this while often neglecting emotional and spiritual healing. Palliative care views the patient as a whole person who is more than the sum of their physical ailments. Those physical ailments can prevent us from seeing who our patients really are and what will really make their lives better. Weirdly enough, those same ailments can give our patients permission to address other ailments that have been neglected for too long. These are psychological, spiritual, and emotional ailments that are in the way of our true happiness. As a pediatric intensive care doctor, I can't always be successful in the traditional way, but I can always be successful in making my patients' lives better, when I use palliative care.

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June, 2023