

Palliative Care: A Social Worker's Perspective

A multidisciplinary, holistic approach to palliative care is essential in providing the opportunity for a person to live the best quality of life possible when faced with a serious illness or a terminal diagnosis. As a member of the interdisciplinary team the palliative care social worker has three primary social work roles: (1) conduct a psychosocial assessment and develop a comprehensive care plan to establish goals and interventions that meet the person's mental, emotional and social needs; (2) advocate for the person, coordinate care and services and intervene in crisis situations; and (3) provide education regarding available options and resources and offer anticipatory grief counseling and emotional support to the person and his or her family as they face the most vulnerable time of their lives.

Completing a thorough psychosocial assessment provides valuable information to the social worker in key areas including the current physical and mental status and cognition, how the person is coping mentally, emotionally and socially and coping strategies utilized, any unresolved family issues or crisis situations that exist, anticipatory grief that the person and family may be feeling and how it is displayed, what matters most to the person and any unfinished tasks or final wishes. I find this assessment to often be very emotional for the person and this is the first step taken in developing a trusting relationship between the person and the social worker.

Understanding what matters most to a person who is facing their own mortality as the end of their life approaches enables me to meet them where they are in a non-judgmental manner. To strongly advocate for what matters most and assist the person in completing any unfinished tasks or final wishes is a very humbling experience for me.

Anticipatory grief may be caused by sadness and concern about leaving loved ones, family conflict, estrangement, the need to reconcile, watching a loved one decline and change and knowing that death is approaching. It is always my personal goal to offer the person the tools to find comfort and peace in his or her end-of-life journey.

I leave you with these words from Ann Richardson "We cannot change the outcome but we **can affect the journey.**"

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