

# Palliative Care: what is it & who is it for?



**This information sheet from the Irish Hospice Foundation (IHF) addresses frequently asked questions about palliative care and how to access it.**

## **1. What is palliative care?**

Palliative care is holistic care that focuses on relieving pain and other symptoms when you have a serious illness, regardless of age, diagnosis, or stage of illness. This type of care aims to improve quality of life for people with life-limiting illnesses and their families. Palliative care is often offered alongside other treatments. Receiving palliative care does not necessarily mean you are dying. Specialist palliative care professionals are experts in the management of pain and other symptoms to include breathlessness. As a result, you may only spend a short time interacting with these professionals and/or you may move in and out of requiring specialist palliative care services depending on your needs.

## **2. Who provides palliative care?**

All doctors, nurses and healthcare professionals provide a level of palliative care. However, sometimes more specialised care is needed and doctors, nurses and other specially trained healthcare professionals can be called on to provide advice about treatment options, guidance, care and support with decision-making. Additionally, some people experience a range of issues that can be difficult to manage. The specially trained palliative care team can be accessed to help with managing these issues. If you are being cared for at home it is important to remember that your GP is still your main care provider with support being available from the Public Health Nursing team.

## **3. Who can access palliative care?**

If you have a serious, progressive and/or life-limiting illness you can access palliative care in Ireland.

## **4. How much does palliative care cost?**

Palliative care is free in Ireland. Where people have private medical insurance, their insurer may be asked to contribute towards the cost of their care.



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## 5. Do you have to have cancer to access palliative care?

No. Palliative care is available to people with illnesses such as heart failure, Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), dementia, end-stage renal failure, motor neurone disease, Huntington's disease, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease, progressive supranuclear palsy and many other life-limiting illnesses, in addition to cancer.

## 6. Do you have to be in a hospice to access palliative care?

No. As well as being available in hospices, palliative care can be accessed in hospital, in residential centres, nursing homes and/or at home.

- If you are in hospital your doctor can call on the specially trained palliative care doctors and nurses to see you in the hospital.
- If you are living in a residential centre or nursing home the staff there and/or your GP can also access the specially trained palliative care doctors and nurses to be involved in your care.
- If you are in your own home your doctor in the hospital (if you are seeing one), your GP or Public Health Nurse can arrange for a referral to be sent to the community based specially trained palliative care team to be involved in your care. This might involve you attending day services at your local hospice or a visit from the palliative care doctor and/or nurse. These visits might happen more regularly as you near the end of life.

About the Irish Hospice Foundation Palliative Care for All Programme:  
Since 2008 the Irish Hospice Foundation have been working to highlight the benefit of palliative care for people with illnesses other than cancer. See more information here:  
<https://hospicefoundation.ie/healthcare-programmes/palliative-care/>  
A range of resources are available on our website: [www.hospicefoundation.ie](http://www.hospicefoundation.ie) or can be requested from the Irish Hospice Foundation.

For more information and/or to join our contact list email: [Deirdre.shanagher@hospicefoundation.ie](mailto:Deirdre.shanagher@hospicefoundation.ie)  
This information sheet was developed as part of the Irish Hospice Foundation Palliative Care for All Programme.