

St. Vincent's Hospital Manhattan
Supportive Care Program

~~Individuals with advanced and progressive illnesses require specialized services to coordinate the many aspects of their care from the time of diagnosis and admission through bereavement. The needs of the terminally ill and their families — medical treatment, psychosocial support and spiritual care — must be met with a focus on respecting patient and family goals and choices. As a terminal illness progresses, patients and families require assistance to both adapt and cope with the challenges they face in order to maximize the amount of time they can continue to live at home and retain the best quality-of-life possible.~~

Terminal and progressive illnesses such as AIDS, cancer and Alzheimer's disease, among others, do not progress within an exact timeframe or even one that can be accurately estimated, therefore patients are not well served by programs designed for a limited amount of time only. In order to allow a patient to live and die with the greatest amount of dignity and comfort possible, services must accommodate patients' and families' needs for as long as they are required. Patients with advanced and progressive illnesses include individuals who do not have families or any type of support system, such as the economically disadvantaged, the homeless, and the isolated elderly. Without a network of specialized services to rely on, many individuals would have nowhere to turn for medical assistance, referrals or support during the last years of their lives.

As a part of the high quality, comprehensive care provided by St. Vincent's Hospital Manhattan, the Supportive Care Program has been providing services and meeting the needs of patients with advanced and progressive illnesses since 1979. The program has a broad approach to end-of-life care, recognizing that relationships with patients involve much more than a medical diagnosis. Patients must be cared for as individual human beings capable of forming and enjoying trusting relationships and living out their final days with great dignity. It is the ability of the Supportive Care staff to develop these relationships with patients that sets the program apart from other end-of-life care programs in the area.

Supportive Care Program Description

The Supportive Care Program is a resource for the terminally ill that offers a network of services designed to meet a patient's physical, psychological and spiritual needs. Program staff serve as liaisons with a patient's physician and other health care providers to ensure the greatest level of comfort and quality-of-life possible. An interdisciplinary team comprised of nurses, social workers, psychiatrists, chaplains, and volunteers follow a patient throughout his or her illness for anywhere from six months to several years. The services that the SCP team offers are critical in allowing individuals to remain at home for as long as possible, even during the final stages of a terminal illness. The "support" component of this unique program is provided in a variety of ways to meet a patient's individual needs and includes services frequently associated with the case management side of social work.

Supportive Care provides seamless support over a patient's continuum of care beginning in the hospital or physician's office and continuing to a rehabilitation facility or clinic. Supportive Care staff meet with patients to discuss their illness, answer questions and provide assistance and support in a variety of ways. When patients return home or move to a nursing facility, ~~Supportive Care staff will help them adjust to the move and the new environment, as well as to~~ changes in their condition. Supportive Care services include unlimited visits throughout all hospitalizations and changes in condition for as long as they are needed.

Specific program activities include:

- counseling and education about the specific nature of the illness or disease, and guidance and instructions for care procedures;
- assistance and psychosocial support as patient and family adjust to treatment regimens, changes in regimens or limitations on their physical abilities;
- coordination of care among multiple providers;
- medication information and adherence monitoring;
- pain management;
- assessment of patients' physical and emotional status or their responses to treatments between provider visits;
- referrals to other providers such as rehabilitation, support groups, psychotherapy, or skilled nursing care;
- advanced care planning including health care proxies/living wills and guardianship issues;
- provision and referrals for caregiver support, assistance and support to family members;
- anticipatory grief counseling for families and bereavement counseling or referrals to bereavement support groups.

~~In 2008, the Supportive Care Program and the Family Caregiver Center merged and now offer services jointly under one umbrella. This has provided greater coordination of resources and support for initiatives they conduct in partnership.~~