What is a palliative approach?

A palliative approach aims to improve the quality of life for individuals with a life-limiting illness or who are dying due to the ageing process, by reducing their suffering through early identification, assessment and holistic treatment of pain, physical, psychological, social, cultural, and spiritual needs.

A palliative approach is not delayed until the end stages of an illness or the ageing process. Instead, a palliative approach provides a focus on active comfort care and a positive approach to reducing an individual's symptoms and distress, which facilitates residents and their families understanding that they are being actively supported through this process.

Underlying the philosophy of a palliative approach is a positive and open attitude towards death and dying.

Reference: Guidelines for a Palliative Approach in Residential Aged Care Enhanced version 2006



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Palliative Care

Link Nurses

Name: .....

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What is a Link Nurse?

- Registered nurse, either Div 1 or Div 2 (mostly Medication Endorsed) who is employed in residential aged care
- Has developed or is developing knowledge and skills in the implementation and practice of the palliative approach in aged care
- Is part of the clinical care team
- Is able to utilise the skills and knowledge to improve care of the residents when the aim of care is comfort and support
- Can also advise and assist other members of the staff to utilise the palliative approach
- Works with other members of the organisation to implement new ideas such as pathways in the palliative approach
- Is a member of the Link Nurse Network and regularly attends the education updates offered by the Network



What are the benefits of Palliative Care Link Nurses?

- Enhance practice
- Encourage staff to take responsibility for implementation of the palliative approach in their work setting.
- Recognition of the resident whose condition is no longer responding to routine care and would benefit from using the palliative approach
- Open discussion of the options for end of life care with the resident and family
- Increased focus on the family
- Timely referrals when /if required.
- Support for the other staff by having a link nurse in their work area
- Capacity building for the nurse, the work area and the agency with the increase in knowledge and skills
- Increase access to the GP, specialist palliative care services and allied health by increased recognition when referral/consultation is appropriate
- Improved communication between staff with the development of a palliative care plan
- Increasing the use of MBS items specific to aged care to encourage the GP to attend the RACF

What can a Palliative Care Link Nurse do?

- Assess a resident using a palliative approach framework
- Develop a palliative care/approach care plan
- Involve the GP in care plan development
- Refer to appropriate services as required
- Provide support and assistance to other staff to implement the palliative approach by providing assistance with assessment or development of the care plan
- To discuss and develop an advance care plan with a competent resident or with the “Person Responsible” if resident is not competent
- To support families to understand the resident’s condition and prognosis
- To develop a Resource File of resources within the agency and those available outside the agency
- To work with other staff in the agency to implement the palliative approach