

Palliative and end of life care...

Are we talking the same language?



When supporting patients who are nearing the end of their life, it is important that health professionals and carers use consistent language.

Below are some of the commonly used and misused phrases:

Try not to say:

Palliative Patient

It is not the patient who is palliative but the approach to their care. Talking about a 'Palliative Patient' is not helpful and should be avoided.

End of Life Patient

'End of Life' can mean different things to different people (and can refer to last few days weeks months or even years). Therefore the term 'End of Life' patient can cause confusion and is best avoided.

Do say:

Palliative Approach

Palliative care is the active holistic care of patients with advanced progressive illnesses. The goal is to achieve the best quality of life for patients and their families. **Palliative care is not only for people who are dying.**

Last days of life

This usually refers to the last few days of life, when a person is 'actively dying'.

Dying

Using the words 'die' or 'dying' can be very helpful for patients and families when you are convinced this person is going to die in the forthcoming days.

Frailty

this is a long term condition implying vulnerability to sudden deterioration. A diagnosis of Severe Frailty is associated with a life expectancy of about 1000 days. Start to consider introducing advance care planning discussions when you recognise severe frailty.

Treatable VS Curable

Increasingly, people are cured of disease and make a full recovery. In other cases a **condition may not be curable, but may be treated.** It is important that we are careful and clear with patients and families as to whether we are aiming to palliate the symptoms or cure their disease.