

Strengthening Health System Capacity for High-Quality Serious Illness Care

INFORMATION FOR ORGANIZATIONAL LEADERS

What is palliative care? What palliative care should all clinicians be able to provide?

Palliative care focuses on improving quality of life for people with serious illness and their families through high-quality communication, advance care planning, symptom management, and emotional and spiritual support. All clinicians who care for seriously ill patients should be able to:

- ▶ Have honest and sensitive discussions about serious illness, including delivering difficult news, discussing goals of care, and helping patients communicate their wishes
- ▶ Assess and manage common physical and psychological symptoms such as pain, nausea, shortness of breath, anxiety, and depression

Why support partnerships between specialty palliative care and other service lines?

Incorporating palliative care into routine care for seriously ill patients is endorsed by many professional societies as an essential aspect of high-quality clinical treatment, and allows a small number of palliative care specialists to have the greatest impact on the most patients. The California Health Care Foundation funded initiatives in nine public health care systems to support partnerships between palliative care and partner service lines. Some key outcomes included improvements in these areas:

Confidence and Comfort	At Alameda Health System, the percentage of emergency medicine residents who felt uncomfortable leading code status discussions dropped from 40% to 0%.
Knowledge and Skills	At LAC+USC Medical Center, radiation oncology residents improved in 12 of 16 areas related to pain assessments.
Efficiency and Uptake	The primary care practices at Contra Costa Health System incorporated advance care planning (ACP) status into the standard care gaps dashboard in their EHR, and saw a sixfold increase in ACP activity.
Patient Care	At Olive View-UCLA Medical Center, 76% of oncology patients who screened positive for pain saw an improvement in pain scores in subsequent visits.

What would it take to replicate these successes at our institution?

The key components of successful projects to improve serious illness care include:

- ▶ Protected time for key members of the implementation team (palliative care specialists and partner service line)
- ▶ Support for staff education and training
- ▶ Support for implementing workflow changes
- ▶ Identifying and monitoring the most important metrics before, during, and after the intervention

What are the next steps?

- ▶ Encourage service lines that care for seriously ill patients to **identify gaps in care and improvement goals** related to communication, symptom management, and patient/family support.
- ▶ Reach out to the palliative care team to identify training resources and relevant tools.
- ▶ **Read project profiles** describing successful palliative care partnerships with a variety of partner service lines.