

Script – Print - A Primer on Palliative Care

First, it's not hospice care

Dr. Trent Barnhart wishes it could be called something else.

Because, he believes, it's too important to be confusing.

Dr. Barnhart is the medical director for post-acute care at OSF HealthCare Saint Anthony Medical Center. He's also overseas inpatient palliative care. Palliative care? What's that? Dr. Barnhart gets that a lot.

It's been around 15 years - 10 years at OSF Saint Anthony - and while it's similar to hospice, it's not actually hospice. It's for patients that have a serious, even chronic illness, where palliative care experts work with the patient's care providers to outline and assist the doctor's care of that patient.

"We talk to all the different doctors that are taking care of the patient and make sure we pull everybody together," says Dr. Trent Barnhart, Medical Director for Post-Acute Care at OSF Saint Anthony Medical Center. "We kind of consider ourselves sort of the communications service. Where we just talk to different providers, make sure we know what everybody is thinking. And then we sit down with the family and make sure that they're getting the best care and make sure everybody knows what's going on."

Palliative care is often called in for cases of congestive heart failure, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), kidney or liver disease.

Many times the patient can be seen in their homes and it can sometimes evolve to hospice care.

"Where we still care for them, but we're focusing more on comfort," says Dr. Trent Barnhart, Medical Director for Post-Acute Care at OSF Saint Anthony Medical Center. "We're not focusing on being curative. But we do focus on keeping people going as long as their body will let them keep going. "We don't give up on them, ever."

Patients should consult with their primary care physician or specialist to determine if palliative care is necessary or could be of benefit.

Also, because of the serious or chronic nature of a patient's condition, palliative care includes an important consideration for them and their families - advanced care planning.

"You need to have somebody in mind that would like to make - help you make, make decisions for you or to stand up for you when you're in a situation where you can't," says Dr. Trent Barnhart, Medical Director for Post-Acute Care at OSF Saint Anthony Medical Center. "And that's called a P-O-A, or power of attorney for health care."

For more information on OSF HealthCare palliative care, including a list of frequently asked questions (FAQ), visit www.osfhealthcare.org/supportive-care/services/palliative-care/.