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THE INSTITUTE FOR
PALLIATIVE MEDICINE
at San Diego Hospice

Study Finds Palliative Care Prolongs Life in Cancer Patients

San Diego's Institute for Palliative Medicine Praises Study as Opportunity to Raise Awareness

(San Diego) – A precedent-setting study published in the *New England Journal of Medicine* on Thursday, August 19 demonstrates definitively that early referrals to palliative care prolongs life for patients living with metastatic lung cancer.

While palliative medicine specialists have long observed improvements among their patients, this study conducted at Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston is the first randomized, controlled study to show that people with life-limiting illnesses can live far longer and far better, with much less pain, anxiety and depression.

“Today’s news is precedent-setting for all of us in the palliative care field,” said Dr. Charles von Gunten, MD, PhD, Provost of The Institute for Palliative Medicine at San Diego Hospice. “The patients involved in this study who received palliative care from the moment of their cancer diagnosis along with standard cancer treatment lived twice as long as patients receiving cancer treatment alone. And they were spared much of the physical and emotional suffering that is far too common among people with life-limiting illnesses.

“What’s exciting to us is that this study demonstrates that palliative care should not be considered a last resort, or giving up,” noted Dr. von Gunten. “It should be offered as early as possible as part of standard treatment.”

“Significant breakthroughs in the field of palliative medicine such as the results of this study have a dual benefit. First, there is the actual effect on the patient receiving palliative care,” said von Gunten. “But second and in many ways equally as important is the opportunity to bring more awareness to the enormous benefits of palliative medicine, especially when it is made available to patients with life-limiting illness as early as possible.”

Dr. von Gunten says physicians remain reluctant to recommend palliative care, and patients are reluctant to accept it. “They often feel as if it means they are ‘abandoning hope,’ but this is not at all the case,” said von Gunten. “Frequently the benefits of palliative care allow someone to live much longer than expected, as this groundbreaking study shows. More important though is the ability of palliative medicine to greatly improve the quality of life, to make the most of whatever hours, days, weeks, months, or more are left, expanding an individual’s time with family and friends and the things they love most in life.”

“We are making huge advancements in patient and family care, education and research in the field of palliative medicine, and every day brings something new that can benefit people,” said Kathleen Pacurar, President and CEO of San Diego Hospice and The Institute for Palliative Medicine. “It is vitally important that we continue to fund research into the effects of palliative medicine. Government resources are stretched thin. It is up to private philanthropy and encouragement by our experts in this field, along with the testimonials by members of the public whose loved ones have benefited from palliative care, to support ongoing education and research efforts.”

“Support for San Diego Hospice and The Institute for Palliative Medicine allows our world-class physicians and other palliative care practitioners to come together, share resources and literally change lives by learning how best to prevent human suffering,” concluded Pacurar.

“Congratulations to our colleagues at the Massachusetts General Hospital in Boston for this precedent-setting research, and to our colleagues at the Center to Advance Palliative Care (www.capc.org) for their extraordinary efforts to raise public awareness about this precedent-setting study,” said Dr. von Gunten.

About The Institute for Palliative Medicine at San Diego Hospice

The Institute for Palliative Medicine at San Diego Hospice is internationally recognized for its excellence in palliative care education and research. Dedicated to the relief of suffering through the transformation of health care, it focuses on discovering, demonstrating and disseminating strategies for palliative care in existing health care systems whether here in San Diego or throughout the world. Physicians and healthcare professionals from around the globe come to The Institute for Palliative Medicine at San Diego Hospice to study. Home to the country’s largest palliative medicine physician fellowship program, The Institute also provides education to more than 2,000 health care students and professionals each year. The Institute helped pioneer the palliative medicine subspecialty approved by the American Board of Medical Specialties in 2006. **For more information, visit online at www.palliativemed.org.**