

A message from your Palliative Care Resource Team

January 2024



How can you support earlier access to palliative care?

While the Canadian Institute for Health Information (CIHI) has found that more Canadians are receiving palliative care, those who would benefit continue to be identified late. CIHI found that most Canadians start receiving palliative care within only a few weeks or days of their death (CIHI, 2023 p 13-14).

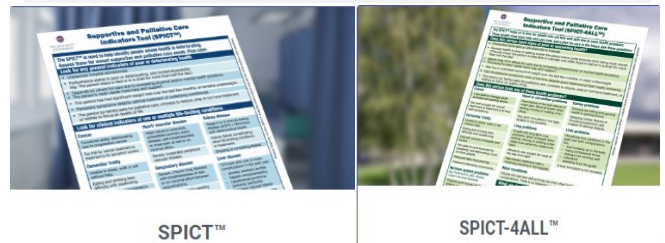
In the process of providing care, it can be difficult to recognize changes in an individual's health over time. This may lead to missed opportunities to offer a palliative approach to care earlier in the illness trajectory. Two simple tools to help with this issue are the Surprise Question, and the Supportive and Palliative Care Indicators Tool (SPICT).

*Would I be surprised
if this person died in
the next 12 months?*

The Surprise Question simply asks clinicians to reflect on the question above. If the clinician answers yes, the patient should be considered in a broader context for palliative care services. This isn't to suggest that a palliative approach to care is only integrated in the last year of life but is instead used to help providers recognize, anticipate, and support palliative care needs earlier.

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The SPICT tool is also used for earlier identification of those who may benefit from a palliative approach to care. (<https://www.spict.org.uk/>) The SPICT tool and its variations use general and condition specific indicators of deterioration to identify people who may have unmet supportive or palliative care needs.

Canadian Institute for Health Information (2023). Access to Palliative Care in Canada. Ottawa, ON: CIHI; 2023. <https://www.cihi.ca/sites/default/files/document/access-to-palliative-care-in-canada-2023-report-en.pdf>

Downer, J., Goldman, R., Pinto, R., Englesakis, M., and Adhikari, N. (2017) The "surprise question" for predicting death in seriously ill patients: A systematic review and meta-analysis. CMAJ April 03, 2017 189 (13) E484-E493; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1503/cmaj.160775> <https://www.cmaj.ca/content/cmaj/189/13/E484.full.pdf>

The SPICT Programme (2023). Spict, Supportive and palliative care indicators tool. University of Edinburgh. Accessed October 16, 2023. {[Spict.org.uk](https://spict.org.uk)}

How can the common illness trajectories support an earlier palliative approach to care?

We know that most Canadians will experience either a dwindling or stuttering functional decline as part of their journey through advanced life limiting illness (Murray, 2020)

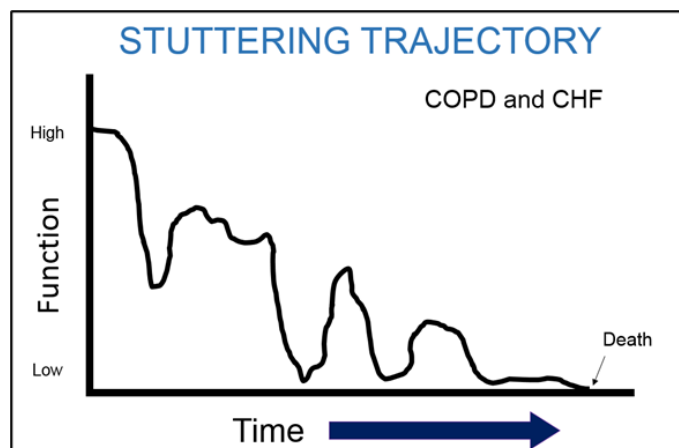
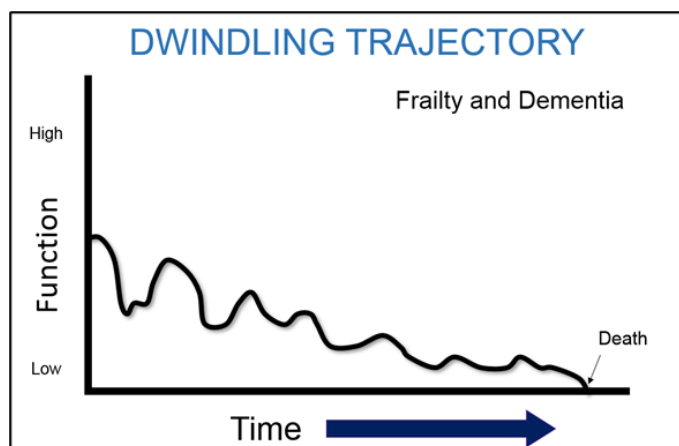
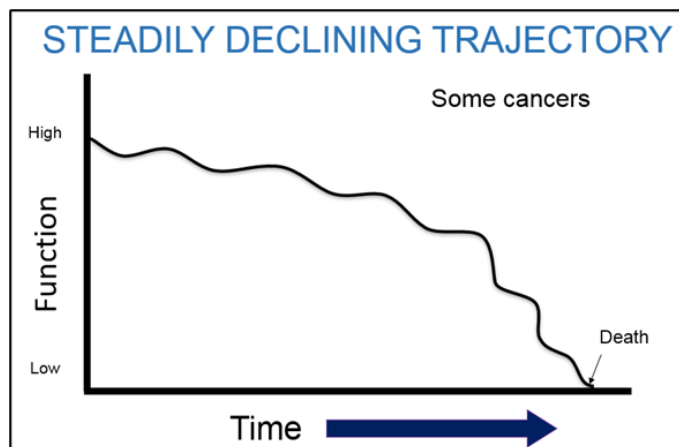
As care team members if we familiarize ourselves with common illness trajectories we can anticipate and support people and their loved ones through the ups and downs of advanced progressive chronic conditions. Understanding common illness trajectories can help normalize expected and/or unexpected changes in health status, especially for many organ related advanced illnesses.

The *Strengthening a Palliative Approach in Long Term Care Program (SPA-LTC)* has found success putting this into practice. SPA-LTC integrated the common illness trajectories into disease specific client and family education brochures. These can be found here: <https://spaltec.ca/illness-trajectory/> These brochures were meant to “encourage residents and family/friends to engage in advance care planning” (Sussman et. al, 2017).

In their review, Sussman et. al (2017) found that using these pamphlets including educating around the typical illness trajectories “encouraged residents and families to think about personal values and goals of care, clarified what to ask, and increased their comfort in talking about end of life”.

Murray, K. (2020). *Integrating a palliative approach: Essentials for personal support workers* (A. Gilbert, Ed.) Life and Death Matters, Victoria, BC, Canada

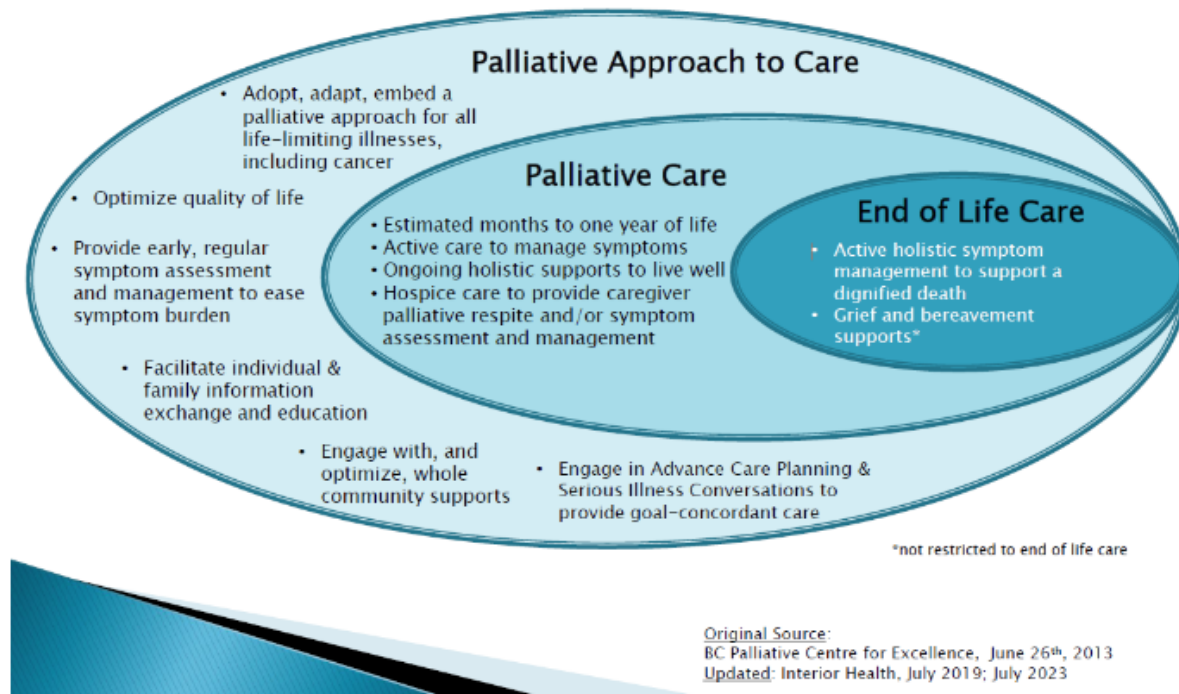
Sussman, T., Kaasalainen, S., Bui, M., Akhtar-Danesh, N., Mintzberg, S., & Strachan, P. (2017). “Now I don’t have to guess”: Using pamphlets to encourage residents and families/friends to engage in advance care planning in long-term care. *Gerontology and geriatric medicine*, 3, 1-11



How does palliative care change over time?

The myth that palliative care only occurs in the last days and weeks of life is a barrier to early palliative care.

Differentiating and Understanding the Palliative Continuum: Palliative Approach to Care vs Palliative Care vs End of Life Care



The pervasiveness of this belief contributes to the stigma associated with the words palliative care, and ultimately to decreased access to early palliative care (Cherny, 2009). For an interesting read, Cherny (2009) describes three strategies to address the stigma including; “getting over it”, “getting around it”, and “living with it”. You can find it here: <https://acsjournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/cncr.24212>

Lack of clarity about the work of early palliative care can also contribute to this problem. The image above shows which care tasks encompass a palliative approach to care throughout an illness journey. As shown above, early in the illness focus can be on tasks such as engaging in advance care planning, relationship building, and exploring illness comprehension and coping. These examples of how providers can support individuals early in their illness are not always recognized as active care.

With care team and public awareness, a palliative approach to care can begin at the time of diagnosis with a life-limiting illness.

Image from: <https://www.interiorhealth.ca/health-and-wellness/palliative-and-end-of-life-care/palliative-care-overview> original source: BC Palliative Centre for Excellence, June 26th, 2013.

Cherny, N.I. (2009), Stigma associated with “palliative care”. *Cancer*, 115: 1808-1812. <https://doi.org/10.1002/cncr.24212>

News and Events

Jan 24 —Pallium Echo Webinar

Palliative care for the structurally vulnerable

<https://www.echopalliative.com/2022/03/02/community-based-primary-palliative-care-community-of-practice/>

Feb 4—World Cancer Day

<https://cancer.ca/en/ways-to-give/world-cancer-day>

March—[National Social Worker Month](#)

March 6 - Black Balloon Day

Recognizing and celebrating those who have lost their lives to substance use related harms

Mar 17— Proposed [MAiD Legislation Update](#)

Apr 16 Advance Care Planning Day

<https://www.advancecareplanning.ca/>

Education Modules

- Introduction to Palliative Care Service Delivery in the Yukon:

<https://yglearn.gov.yk.ca/palliative-care/3806>

- Yukon Advance Care Planning:

<https://yglearn.gov.yk.ca/palliative-care/3031>

- Victoria Hospice Palliative Performance Scale (PPSv2):

<https://yglearn.gov.yk.ca/palliative-care/3203>

- Edmonton Symptom Assessment System (ESAS-r):

<https://yglearn.gov.yk.ca/palliative-care/1866>

Upcoming at



January 24 (5 Wednesday webinars) - Caregiving through Loss and Grief

February 28 - Living with Loss webinar

May 22 & 23 - Grief and the Frontline Professions

Details at www.hospiceyukon.net/events

The Palliative Care Resource Team

How does the Palliative Care Resource Team (PCRT) support Yukoner’s living with a life-limiting illness and the people caring for them?

- We connect individuals to existing services and programs.
- We provide links to resources and information regarding a variety of topics, including: advance care planning and caregiver specific supports.
- We provide public education sessions.

How does PCRT support Yukon health care providers?

- We assist with health systems navigation.
- We support care transitions and discharge planning.
- We offer symptom management consultation.
- We link health care providers to best practice resources, tools and information.
- We facilitate and provide palliative care education for health care providers.

For more information about the palliative care resource team and our services please contact us at:

Email: palliativecare@yukon.ca

Phone: (867) 667-9380

<https://yukon.ca/en/palliative-care>