

# Progress in End-of-life Care for Patients with Advanced Cancer

Xun Wang\*

\*Correspondence to: Xun Wang, Qingdao Mental Health Center, Qingdao, Shandong Province, 266000, China, E-mail: [wxzsu@126.com](mailto:wxzsu@126.com)

**Abstract:** In China, the number of malignant tumor patients is rapidly increasing, a trend that has drawn more and more attention to the novel care approach of end-of-life care. For patients in the late stages of cancer, end-of-life care not only provides physical comfort but also enhances their quality of life in the final stages of life. Despite mature research on end-of-life care both domestically and internationally, there are still some issues to address. In order to help terminal cancer patients better understand end-of-life care, this article will delve into the advantages and specific care content of end-of-life care, hoping to promote its popularization in hospitals and communities, enabling patients and their families to face the disease and death with greater calmness and understanding.

**Keywords:** Late-stage cancer patients; End-of-life care; Nursing

During the treatment process, most late-stage cancer patients experience an overwhelming psychological burden and a sense of fear, often feeling that "life is worse than death." This is the most difficult period for late-stage cancer patients during treatment. Alongside receiving appropriate medication, patients also require psychological therapy and humanistic care to address their mental health needs. The lack of such support can lead to tragic events such as mental health issues or even suicide. Late-stage cancer patients undergo immense psychological burden and mental anguish during treatment, significantly impacting their understanding of their condition and choices regarding treatment methods. Therefore, post-treatment care is crucial.<sup>[1]</sup> While it may not cure the disease, it can alleviate the patients' suffering to some extent, enabling them to

depart peacefully.

## 1. The advantages of end-of-life care for patients with advanced malignant tumors

End-of-life care, also known as "palliative care" or "comfort care," is dedicated to providing comprehensive nursing services for terminally ill patients and their families. It not only addresses the patients' physiological needs but also delves into their innermost feelings, attending to their psychological needs, while also considering the emotions and well-being of their families. The goal of end-of-life care is to ensure that patients receive full respect and dignity in the final stages of life, effectively control symptoms, and enhance their quality of life. For those with advanced malignant tumors, who have already endured the trauma of surgery or the side



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effects of chemotherapy and radiation, facing death brings immense psychological stress, and both their bodies and minds suffer great pain. Studies show that up to 93.75% of patients hope to avoid unnecessary resuscitation and treatment in the final stages of life, preferring to pass away comfortably and with dignity.<sup>[3]</sup> End-of-life care is precisely such a service—it provides professional nursing care tailored to the specific needs of patients, meeting their final needs.

Specifically, good end-of-life care can alleviate pain. Faced with the pain of advanced cancer, patients cannot escape its torment. Compared to traditional nursing methods, end-of-life care is more effective in relieving patients' pain, providing them with a more comfortable experience. Wang Chunhua and other experts conducted end-of-life care practices on 82 patients with advanced malignant tumors, and the results showed a significant improvement in patients' pain levels after intervention ( $P < 0.05$ ), compared to the conventional care group, whose effects were not significant. This indicates that end-of-life care has significant advantages in alleviating pain in patients with advanced malignant tumors, compared to traditional nursing methods; in terms of quality of life, patients with terminal cancer are greatly affected by the disease, and their daily life activities are severely compromised. End-of-life care provides them with substantial assistance, allowing patients to live more comfortably in their final days; in terms of psychological status, facing the fate of death, people often find it difficult to accept. For patients with terminal cancer, they bear enormous psychological pressure, fearing the disease and resisting death. This fear and resistance torment them every day, even leading some patients into the dilemma of depression, further exacerbating their condition. However, the emergence of end-of-life care brings hope to these patients. Through scientific methods, it guides patients to correctly understand and face the disease, avoiding misunderstandings, thus facing death more calmly.

## **2. End-of-life care for patients with advanced cancer**

### **2.1 Psychological care**

In the late stage of cancer, patients become increasingly weak physically, but their desire for life and fear of death linger persistently. Therefore, psychological care for terminally ill patients is crucial. It is not only to

make patients feel comfortable and supported but also to help them face death and find inner strength. The demeanor and actions of caregivers can influence the psychological state of patients significantly. Providing appropriate psychological support can help patients go through the final moments of life more calmly. The psychological changes in terminally ill patients can generally be divided into five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. Each stage has its unique emotional expressions and needs. Caregivers need to fully understand and respect these changes in patients to provide the most suitable care. For patients with advanced cancer, caregivers need to offer them more understanding and support. During the denial and anger stages, caregivers need to patiently listen, understand the patients' feelings, and give them sufficient respect. During the bargaining and depression stages, caregivers can help patients by guiding them to review their life experiences, allowing them to express emotions, and finding the meaning of life, enabling them to accept reality calmly. During the acceptance stage, caregivers need to provide patients with adequate comfort and support, allowing them to peacefully complete the final journey of life.

### **2.2 Life Care**

In terms of life care, the first priority is to create a good living environment for patients. Although facing death, the final moments should not be merely waiting for it. Hospice care regards the end-of-life period as a special form of existence. During the process of caring for and supporting patients, caregivers should respect the patients' personal privacy and cultural beliefs. Hospital rooms should be spacious, bright, and cozy, furnished with amenities such as television, books, newspapers, and radio, along with adding some plants to invigorate the patients with a sense of vitality. Additionally, placing nostalgic photos and handicrafts can enhance the environment. Decoration designs should be tailored to the specific preferences of the patients to create a harmonious, tranquil, aesthetically pleasing, and comfortable living environment. Secondly, adequate nutritional support should be provided to patients. Because cancer can lead to excessive bodily consumption, caregivers should timely explain the relationship between nutrition and overall health to patients and their families, in order to arrange a more

varied diet. The emphasis should be on providing easily digestible high-protein, high-vitamin, and high-fiber foods, adjusting the color, aroma, and taste of the patient's diet according to their individual preferences to stimulate their appetite. When patients suffer from oral ulcers, local anesthesia can be applied to relieve pain; for those prone to nausea and vomiting, appropriate antiemetics should be administered; if normal eating is not possible, enteral or parenteral nutrition can be considered. Thirdly, daily care should be carried out effectively. Patients in the late stages of cancer generally have poor immunity. Caregivers should assist patients with mouth rinsing in the morning, after meals, and before sleep to maintain oral hygiene. Lip balm can be used for patients with dry lips, and local medications can be applied as needed for oral ulcers or fungal infections. Additionally, attention should be paid to skin care to ensure patients maintain a comfortable position, using olive oil or talcum powder to reduce friction. For patients with urinary or fecal incontinence, gentle cleaning should be provided promptly; for those suffering from abdominal distension and constipation, dietary adjustments and laxatives or enemas can be utilized. Patients with edema should wear loose cotton clothing to prevent friction injuries and infections. Bed sheets should be kept clean, smooth, and free of debris, and air mattresses can be used to reduce skin pressure and prevent pressure ulcers. After sweating, patients should have their clothing and bed sheets changed promptly, and they should be given fluids to avoid chilling. These measures aim to improve the quality of life for patients, respecting their personal privacy and cultural beliefs, and helping them feel cared for and comfortable during the end-of-life stage.

### **2.3 Principles of Moderate Treatment**

Patients with advanced-stage tumors are the focus of end-of-life care. For them, therapeutic interventions are no longer effective. The traditional treatment approach, which prioritizes cure as the primary goal, mainly involves using advanced life-saving equipment to treat patients, thereby prolonging their lives. However, in reality, this undoubtedly exacerbates the patients' suffering. During this process, the emotional, psychological, and financial burdens on the patients' families also continue to increase. Therefore, under the model of end-of-life care, treatment is not aimed

at prolonging the patient's life but rather focuses more on the patient's comfort. The goal is to alleviate the patient's suffering through certain nursing measures. Since pain has a significant impact on the quality of life of patients with advanced-stage tumors, caregivers need to closely monitor and document changes in the patient's pain, ensuring effective pain control. By reassessing and adjusting medication dosages, caregivers provide more humane care and services to the patients.

### **2.4 Social Support System**

In the final stages of life, the care and support from colleagues, friends, workplaces, and relevant social groups are of great significance to patients. Not only does this help alleviate their physical and mental suffering, but it also allows them to feel cared for and supported by those around them during their final moments.

## **3. Care for Patients' Families**

### **3.1 Providing Emotional Support and Maintaining a Balanced Mindset**

End-of-life patients can be a significant source of stress for their families, leading to a sharp increase in their stress levels and resulting in emotional issues such as anxiety and depression. Therefore, caregivers need to pay attention to the level of stress experienced by the patients' families and actively engage in communication and dialogue with them and their friends. This helps establish a good level of trust with the patients, allowing them to accept the inevitable departure of their loved one. Additionally, caregivers should guide the families on how to deal with their emotions correctly, providing them with appropriate opportunities and spaces to express their grief. Patiently listening to their inner feelings, understanding, providing support, and offering comfort are essential to providing comprehensive emotional support to the patients' families.

### **3.2 Providing Nursing Guidance Based on Actual Needs**

In end-of-life care, family members and friends of the patient play a crucial role as caregivers. While providing meticulous care to the patient, the role of family members cannot be overlooked. Terminally ill patients often crave the company and care of

their loved ones, as they fear loneliness. Therefore, caregivers should provide guidance, explanations, and demonstrations of relevant nursing techniques to family members. This helps provide some psychological comfort to family members during the caregiving process, alleviating their inner pain.

### 3.3 Implementing End-of-Life Education to Dispel Misconceptions Among Family Members

Caregivers should help the patient's family members understand the true essence of life and guide them to have a correct understanding of death. Through end-of-life education, family members can gradually realize that life and death are an irresistible natural law, thus eliminating their fear of death. In this way, family members can be mentally prepared for the patient's departure, reducing their pain of losing a loved one and guiding them to face reality and break free from psychological misconceptions.

### Conclusion

In conclusion, providing end-of-life care for patients with advanced-stage tumors and their families holds significant practical significance. It not only entails comprehensive care and services for the physical and mental well-being of the patients but also embodies respect for their lives. Faced with incurable late-stage cancer patients, end-of-life care offers a warm, humane way of caring, allowing patients to depart with dignity in the final stages of life. Although China has made some achievements in end-of-life care nursing, further in-depth research is still needed to enhance relevant mechanisms and policies, promoting high-quality development in end-of-life care nursing.

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