

Consult Experts by Phone to Help Residents with Troubling Symptoms and Behaviors

Do you care for people with serious illnesses who have poorly controlled physical symptoms or troubling behaviors? Is it challenging to keep them comfortable or to prevent their behaviors from causing harm to others? A specialized service from PalliaHealth by Agrace can help.

PalliaHealth Telemedicine offers resident-focused **palliative care and geriatric psychiatry consulting services by phone**. Our geriatric psychiatrist and board-certified palliative-care nurse practitioners will call you to explore new ways to address residents' symptoms and behaviors, and bring them more relief.



Susan Husom, RN

Susan Husom, RN, practice manager for PalliaHealth, explains, "A PalliaHealth consult can give you new ideas for helping a resident who has uncontrolled symptoms or behaviors and doesn't clearly qualify for hospice care. It might be a person who has trouble expressing their needs, due to

dementia or another condition. We can talk about tools that will help your staff and the resident cope better, so the resident is able to stay in their current setting longer."

Clara's Case

Clara,* 90, struggled with depression, anxiety, back pain and gastric reflux. Her caregivers at Elderspan requested a PalliaHealth Telemedicine consult to find new ways to manage her symptoms and behaviors, which included excessive, loud throat clearing;

spitting phlegm on walls and carpets (and denying it); rude, aggressive behavior toward others; obsessive/compulsive routines; bowel incontinence and hiding soiled clothes. Additionally, she was upset because her family had stopped taking her on outings.

After a teleconference to discuss Clara's symptoms, medications, recent decline and current interventions, a PalliaHealth physician recommended medication changes to address her reflux symptoms, hacking and OCD-type behaviors. After two weeks, Clara's obsessive behaviors were noticeably improved, as were her interactions with other residents. As a result, Clara's family resumed taking her on outings, which was very satisfying to her. Her caregivers had improved her quality of life—and that of her peers and the facility staff—without having to transport her to a clinic or specialist.

How the service works: During a one-hour phone call, a PalliaHealth physician or a nurse practitioner will review a specific case with you or discuss training topics of your choice. PalliaHealth staff present both medication-based and non-pharmacological interventions. A Telemedicine consult costs \$95/hour with a nurse practitioner or \$175/hour with a physician. You can schedule the service as often as you need support.

PalliaHealth Telemedicine calls are an excellent training opportunity for both new and experienced staff. For more information, call **(800) 930-2770** and ask about PalliaHealth.

* Name changed for privacy.

When There Are No Easy Answers, Ask Agrace's Ethics Committee

A person with end-stage dementia is suffering from what you are identifying as pain, but the family and activated legal decision-makers choose to not medicate the resident. Another resident has made the decision to stop eating and drinking, but their distressed family wants you to feed them anyway. Is that right? Is it ethical?

As your residents decline and near the end of life, care decisions may become even more urgent and complicated. A lack of consensus about their care may create conflict at the precise time when peace would be so welcome. Often, there isn't a *right* or *wrong* choice, only a *best* choice.

When conflicts over resident care become unresolvable ethical dilemmas, Agrace HospiceCare is here for you. **Upon request, our Ethics Committee can consult and advise you on medical ethics cases regarding a person who is a current Agrace patient—or has been referred to Agrace.**



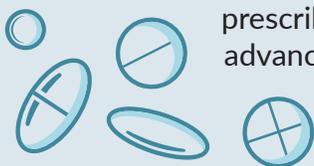
The Agrace Ethics Committee is made up of 10 to 12 Agrace staff and community members: physicians, nurses, social workers, spiritual & grief counselors and non-clinicians. Committee members support ethical reflection, respectful dialogue, critical analysis and conduct that reflects Agrace's commitment to enhancing our patients' quality of life. When asked to consult about a specific patient, the Committee is not a decision-maker; it is an advisory group who will attempt to assist and provide support to those who have the responsibility for making decisions.

If you would like to consult our Ethics Committee, please ask your Agrace RN case manager or liaison for assistance.

Meeting Stricter Psychotropic Medication Regulations

Agrace tries hard to be a good partner to you and your staff as we care for mutual patients. One of our most important concerns is to ensure that our practices are consistent with the regulations placed on long-term care providers.

We are very aware of the new rules about prescribing psychotropic medications in skilled nursing facilities (SNFs). The rules create a challenge for hospices because we often



prescribe these medications in advance, making them available to improve comfort if a patient's needs change

suddenly. Under the new regulations, it will be more challenging for us to have emergent medications available on short notice.

We have worked diligently to create a plan to ensure we can meet your regulations while balancing the symptom-management needs of residents who are Agrace patients.

In the coming weeks, we will communicate more on this plan to our skilled nursing facility partners. In the meantime, please reach out to the Agrace RN case manager in your facility if you have any questions about how these regulations will affect our current mutual patients.



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For more information about any topic in this newsletter, please contact your Agrace outreach liaison or email karri.kelliher@agrace.org

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