



For more information contact:
Dr. Alvin Moss
1-877-209-8086

Center’ s care coordination helps seriously ill patients

Palliative care such as that coordinated through the West Virginia Center for End-of-Life Care helps seriously ill patients live longer and enjoy their time more, according to a new study.

An article in the Aug. 19 issue of the New England Journal of Medicine details a study of lung cancer patients who received standard cancer treatment as well as palliative care versus standard cancer treatment alone. Those patients receiving palliative care did better and lived longer.

Palliative care teams that work with the West Virginia Center for End-of-Life Care, which is funded by the West Virginia Department of Health and Human Resources, saw nearly 2,000 patients representing nearly every West Virginia county last year, helping to provide exactly the kind of treatment the study recommends.

“This proves the benefit of palliative care.” said Dr. Alvin Moss, director of the West Virginia Center for End-of-Life Care. “It’ s critical to provide people with the kind of care that best helps them through their final months, weeks and days. A well-coordinated palliative effort includes pain and symptom management and attention to emotional, social, and spiritual issues. The WV Center for End-of-Life Care is pleased to serve West Virginians by coordinating the WV Palliative Care Network.”

The hospital-based palliative care teams in the Network and associated with the Center for End-of-Life Care have seen more than 1,600 patients in each of the past five years, including 1,911 in 2009 alone. Last year marked the largest percentage increase in total patients treated since 2005.

According to the West Virginia statistics, the largest percentage of people seen by palliative care experts asked for “goal clarification,” meaning they wanted to better define their options for their serious illness. Pain and symptom management was another frequently requested service.

“Too often people wait until the very end to ask for palliative care services,” Moss said.” The research study in the New England Journal of Medicine proves that patients do benefit from earlier palliative care consultation. Our goal is to work with people to assist them to learn their treatment options and determine the types of treatments they want and do not want.”

“Once patients determine what they want,” Dr. Moss says, “it is best for them to put their wishes in writing in addition to talking to their family and doctor.” Among written documents provided by the West Virginia Center for End-of-Life Care are living will, medical power of attorney, and “POST” forms, which include detailed “Physician Orders for Scope of Treatment.” Since West Virginia introduced the POST form in 2002, more than 250,000 have been requested from the Center.

The study cited in the New England Journal of Medicine took place over three years among 151 patients at Massachusetts General Hospital who had metastatic non-small cell lung cancer, a serious form of the disease. It showed that the group receiving palliative care along with standard treatment had a better quality of life and lower rates of depression. In addition, the patients receiving palliative care actually lived nearly three months longer than those in the standard treatment group.

For more information or forms, visit the West Virginia Center for End-of-Life Care website www.wvendoflife.org or call 1-877-209-8086.