New Educational Campaign to Make Americans More Aware of Palliative Care

The Joint Commission releases ‘Speak Up: What you need to know about your serious illness and palliative care’ – advice to help patients, families cope; see video

Oct. 11, 2012 – Palliative care is still not a well-known or understood service, although it has proven to help many patients and the families of patients living with a serious illness or health problem in dealing with emotional, physical and spiritual concerns. A new educational campaign has been launched by The Joint Commission that may heighten awareness of this special health care.

The Joint Commission’s new educational campaign, “Speak Up: What you need to know about your serious illness and palliative care,” covers topics such as how and when to get palliative care, questions that palliative care providers may ask you, questions to ask them, where to find information, and more. The campaign brochure provides helpful tips and encourages people to take action to improve their health.
improve the quality of life of patients and their families by relieving the pain, symptoms and stress of a serious or debilitating illness. Designed to help patients feel better, palliative care can help to relieve symptoms such as loss of appetite, pain, nausea and sleeplessness, as well as provide help with health care decision making, managing health care and supporting family members.

“Seriously ill patients have special physical, emotional and spiritual needs,” says Ronald M. Wyatt, M.D., M.H.H., medical director, Division of Healthcare Improvement, The Joint Commission. “By considering the option of palliative care, these patients and their families may find that palliative is a way to prevent or relieve suffering.”

The Joint Commission’s new palliative care education campaign is part of the award-winning Speak Up program. Speak Up brochures are available in English and Spanish at www.jointcommission.org. The Speak Up program urges people to take an active role in their own health care.

The basic framework of the Speak Up campaign urges patients to:

- **Speak up** if you have questions or concerns, and if you don't understand, ask again. It's your body and you have a right to know.
- **Pay attention** to the care you are receiving. Make sure you're getting the right treatments and medications by the right health care professionals. Don't assume anything.
- **Educate** yourself about your diagnosis, the medical tests you are undergoing, and your treatment plan.
- **Ask** a trusted family member or friend to be your advocate.
- **Know** what medications you take and why you take them. Medication errors are the most common health care errors.
- **Use** a hospital, clinic, surgery center, or other type of health care organization that has undergone a rigorous on-site evaluation against established state-of-the-art quality and safety standards, such as that provided by The Joint Commission.
- **Participate in** all decisions about your treatment. You are the center of the health care team.

Speak Up brochures also are available on the topics of pain management, stroke, breastfeeding, dialysis patients who are hospitalized, diabetes patients who are hospitalized, visiting the doctor’s office, understanding medical tests, recovering after leaving the hospital, preventing medication
mistakes, preventing infections, health literacy, preparing to become a living organ donor, avoiding mistakes in your surgery and preventing errors in care.

The Joint Commission’s new educational campaign was developed in collaboration with the American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine, Association of Professional Chaplains, Center to Advance Palliative Care, Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association, Lance Armstrong Foundation, National Association of Social Workers, and National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

Since its launch in 2002, the Speak Up program has grown to include 20 campaign brochures seven animated videos and 13 posters, free downloadable files of all Speak Up videos, brochures and posters (including Spanish language versions of the brochures and videos) are available on The Joint Commission website. Speak Up brochures and posters also are available for purchase through Joint Commission Resources at 877-223-6866 or online.

**About the Joint Commission**

An independent, not-for-profit organization, The Joint Commission accredits and certifies more than 19,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States. Joint Commission accreditation and certification is recognized nationwide as a symbol of quality that reflects an organization’s commitment to meeting certain performance standards.

Our Mission: To continuously improve health care for the public, in collaboration with other stakeholders, by evaluating health care organizations and inspiring them to excel in providing safe and effective care of the highest quality and value.

Vision Statement: All people always experience the safest, highest quality, best-value health care across all settings.

Sign up to receive future issues of Speak Up™, and join the Speak Up™ E-alerts list.

Visit the Website - [Speak Up: What you need to know about your serious illness and palliative care](http://www.jointcommission.org/speakup)

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**Statements of support for the “Speak Up: What you need to know about your serious illness and palliative care” campaign**

“Palliative care enhances quality of life for individuals and families affected by serious or life-limiting illness. Social workers play an integral role in palliative care, and NASW is pleased to collaborate with The Joint Commission in educating the public about this important topic.”

**Elizabeth Clark, Ph.D., A.C.S.W., M.P.H., executive director, National Association of Social Workers (NASW)**
“Palliative care addresses the needs of the whole person -- body, mind and spirit, and chaplaincy care has an integral role. As members of the palliative care team, professional chaplains help patients and families find meaning in difficult circumstances, as well as offer emotional and spiritual support.”

Rev. Dr. David Johnson BCC, president, Association of Professional Chaplains

"Palliative care teams are seeing rapid growth and transforming the care of serious illness in this country. You can have palliative care from the point of diagnosis and together with curative treatment. Over 63 percent of hospitals have a team today. In addition to providing better quality care to patients and families, palliative care is the key to delivering better coordinated care to our sickest and most vulnerable patients."

Diane E. Meier, M.D., director, Center to Advance Palliative Care

"Hospice palliative care is an essential component of the health care system, helping patients and families well before the final days of life, from diagnosis through the course of an illness, through death and grief with an ongoing focus on compassion and quality."

J. Donald Schumacher, Psy.D., president and CEO, National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

“Coping with a serious illness is not easy – where can patients and families find help? The American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine and other leading palliative care organizations have worked with The Joint Commission to develop the Speak Up campaign for palliative care. It can help patients and families find answers to important questions, such as:

- What is palliative care, and who is it for?
- What services do they offer?
- Will it interfere with my other treatment?
- How long can I receive it?

This short and easy-to-understand brochure can be a helpful first step in getting the extra help patients with a serious illness need to live fully and get the kind of care they most want.”

Porter Storey, M.D., FACP, FAAHPM, executive vice president, American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine

“Open communication between patients, families, and healthcare providers is the essence of palliative care. As a professional nursing association, we are honored to help amplify the awareness of palliative care through the Joint Commission's ‘Speak Up’ campaign.”

Sally K. Welsh, M.S.N., R.N., NEA-BC, chief executive officer, Hospice and Palliative Nurses Association