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**Q:** My mother's doctor says she's going to receive palliative care. What might she expect?

**A:** Palliative care is an approach to care that aims to relieve the suffering and enhance the quality of life of people living with or dying from an advanced or progressive illness. Your mother's doctor has recognized that curing her illness is not possible and will have talked with her about this in a gentle but truthful manner.

Palliative care is provided by an interprofessional team of doctors, nurses, social workers, spiritual care providers, volunteers and others, who will work with your mother's primary doctor in providing care for her and your family.

Care is available in a number of settings including hospitals, clinics, palliative care units, hospices, long-term care homes, and in one's own home. The place where your mother will receive care depends on the complexity of her physical care needs, her life circumstances and her wishes.

Physical comfort is a number one goal of palliative care. The team works hard to ease symptoms by providing pain relievers and other types of medications, and by ensuring good physical care.

The team will support your mother as she makes decisions about treatments she may or may not like to have, the place where she will receive care, and other goals that she identifies. She may choose goals that are focused on providing comfort rather than prolonging life, or goals that include comfort measures blended with some life-prolonging measures such as antibiotics. When deciding about treatments, she will hear the potential benefits and disadvantages.

During this time, your mother will receive emotional and spiritual comfort, as well as guidance on practical matters such as completing her will and power of attorney. Her mind will also be eased in knowing that her family is being provided support as well.

This will be a sad and stressful time for the whole family, which is why the team will spend time listening, providing emotional support and practical advice so the family feels less stressed and stays well. If you wish, team members will also be able to create a space wherein you and your family may express your thoughts and feelings as you reflect on your life together and as you move towards saying farewell.

Your mother may derive some pleasure from listening to music, sharing memories with family and friends, getting outdoors, or just spending quiet time with those she loves. Remembering humorous times in the past or sharing current moments of light-heartedness can be wonderful experiences and will provide the family with lasting memories.

Hospice/Palliative Care Teams will strive to provide a peaceful passing for your mother by adjusting medications and creating a gentle atmosphere. It may ease your mind and your mother's mind to talk with her team about how they will care for her as death draws near.