

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

The Joint Commission Launches Advanced Certification in Palliative Care Program
Focus is on preserving quality of life for patients with serious or advanced illness

(OAKBROOK TERRACE, Ill. – March 25, 2011) Joint Commission accredited hospitals now have the option of seeking Advanced Certification in Palliative Care. Palliative care is the field of medicine designed to improve the quality of life of patients and their families by relieving the pain, symptoms and stress of a serious or debilitating illness. The new certification program launches September 1, 2011 and the standards will be available July 1, 2011.

Palliative care serves patients of all ages at all stages of serious or advanced illness. Palliative care is appropriate from the time of diagnosis and at the same time as all other appropriate curative treatments. It is not dependent on prognosis. In some patient populations palliative care has been shown to prolong life as well as improve its quality. Illnesses most commonly treated by palliative care include heart, lung, kidney and liver disease, as well as cancer, stroke, diabetes, Parkinson's and Alzheimer's.

The Advanced Palliative Care Certification requirements emphasize:

- A formal, organized palliative care program led by an interdisciplinary team whose members possess the requisite expertise in palliative care;
- Leadership endorsement and support of the program's goals for providing care, treatment and services;
- A special focus on patient and family engagement;
- Processes which support the coordination of care and communication among all care settings and providers; and
- The use of evidence-based national guidelines or expert consensus to guide patient care.

The National Quality Forum defines palliative care as patient and family-centered care that optimizes quality of life by anticipating, preventing and treating suffering. Palliative care throughout the continuum of illness involves addressing physical, intellectual, emotional, social and spiritual needs and facilitating patient-centered treatment, autonomy and access to information.

“Palliative care is a key component for improving the lives of patients that face serious illness, and The Joint Commission is very pleased to offer this certification that will help organizations improve the quality of care they provide to these patients,” says Jean E. Range, M.S., R.N., C.P.H.Q., executive director, Disease-Specific Care Certification, The Joint Commission. “As people increasingly become aware of the benefits of palliative care, we are prepared to help organizations meet the needs and expectations of these patients and their families.”

Joint Commission reviewers will evaluate hospital palliative care programs which strive for high quality and supportive care among patients with serious or advanced illnesses. The standards for palliative care certification were developed under the guidance of The Joint Commission Health Care Services Task force, which is composed of experts in palliative care and key stakeholder organizations.

Statements in support of Joint Commission Palliative Care Certification

“Palliative care is focused on maximizing quality of life for seriously ill patients and their families. Over 1500 leading U.S. hospitals today have a palliative care team, and Joint Commission recognition of the importance of palliative care to overall quality of care represents a giant step forward for the field. I know I am joined by colleagues across the country when I express my appreciation to The Joint Commission for helping to ensure that all palliative care teams deliver care of uniformly high quality.”

Diane E. Meier, M.D., director, Center to Advance Palliative Care, and Hertzberg Palliative Care Institute, Mount Sinai School of Medicine

“This palliative care certification program will help ensure that every hospital in America meets high standards of care to help individual patients suffering in cases of serious advanced illness. Control of pain and treatment for other debilitating symptoms are essential for all patients. Employers and their employees should make sure that any hospital they use, or that is in any preferred network or Center of Excellence, has a Palliative Care Program that is certified by The Joint Commission.”

Helen B. Darling, president and CEO, National Business Group on Health

For more information about the Advanced Certification in Palliative Care program, please call (630) 792-5291, or email dscinfo@jointcommission.org.

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Founded in 1951, The Joint Commission seeks 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. The Joint Commission evaluates and accredits more than 18,000 health care organizations and programs in the United States, including more than 9,700 hospitals and home care organizations, and more than 6,800 other health care organizations that provide long term care, behavioral health care, laboratory and ambulatory care services. In addition, The Joint Commission also provides certification of more than 1,700 disease-specific care programs, primary stroke centers, and health care staffing services. An independent, not-for-profit organization, The Joint Commission is the nation's oldest and largest standards-setting and accrediting body in health care. Learn more about The Joint Commission at www.jointcommission.org.