

Palliative Care Resources to Support Frontline Providers during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Recognizing that COVID-19 is a multi-systemic disease that requires holistic care and expertise from various medical specialties, frontline providers need to be prepared, supported and empowered to deliver the necessary care to address an individual's full range of needs. This document collates key resources to enable frontline providers to provide primary level palliative care, including delivering compassionate communication and basic symptom management.

As the needs of the individual, their family, and their caregiver(s) increase, become more complex and/or change over time, it may be necessary to engage a palliative care specialist or other disease specialists for consultation, advice and mentorship. The Regional Palliative Care Network (RPCN) directors and clinical co-leads can be a valuable resource for guidance and access to clinical tools, as well as helping to connect with specialists at the local level. **To obtain contact information for your local RPCN leadership team, please reach out to info@ontariopalliativecarenetwork.ca.**

NOTE: This document was initially developed in April 2020. The content has been updated based on information available as of February 9, 2022.

Support for Compassionate Communication and Difficult Discussions

Ensuring the individual understands the nature and severity of their illness, and exploring their wishes, and goals of care are crucial conversations to support decision-making and enable person-centred care. Hospice Palliative Care Ontario has posted several Goals of Care conversation guides developed by Drs. Steinberg, Incardona, and Myers specifically tailored to patients with COVID-19, in different care settings. These guides are available here: <https://www.speakupontario.ca/>

In addition, practical advice on how to talk about difficult topics related to COVID-19, including specific phrasing for patient and family conversations has been developed by VitalTalk, and is available here: <https://www.vitaltalk.org/guides/covid-19-communication-skills/>

Finally, the Medical Sciences Division, Department of Psychiatry, at the University of Oxford has posted guides for healthcare professionals to support communicating the death of a loved one: https://www.psych.ox.ac.uk/research/covid_comms_support/healthcare-professionals/healthcare-professionals

Symptom management

Managing symptoms for individuals with palliative care needs will be everyone's role. The usual guidelines for symptom management remain appropriate. Specific attention to dyspnea, delirium, nausea and vomiting, and pain will be particularly relevant for individuals with severe symptoms, or those who may be dying as a result of COVID-19.

British Columbia Inter-professional Palliative Symptom Management Guidelines

Best practice symptom management guidelines that are available in both interactive and printable formats: <https://bc-cpc.ca/cpc/publications/symptom-management-guidelines/>

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McMaster University Symptom Management Guidelines

The Division of Palliative Care, Department of Family Medicine at McMaster University have developed Protocols for Symptom Management of Patients with COVID-19, available here:

<https://fhs.mcmaster.ca/palliativecare/documents/McMasterSymptomManagementProtocolsCOVID31March2020.pdf>

End-of-life Care for COVID-19

Patients with COVID-19 have unique needs at the end of life. The Ontario Palliative Care Network (OPCN) synthesized recommendations from various guidance documents to create an Ontario specific one page summary document ***Symptom management for adult patients with COVID-19 receiving end-of-life supportive care outside of the ICU.***

<https://www.ontariopalliativecarenetwork.ca/sites/opcn/files/EndOfLifeSymptomManagement-COVID19.pdf>

For a small number of patients who have severe, refractory symptoms at the end of life, rapid titration or Continuous Palliative Sedation Therapy (CPST) may be needed. The Division of Palliative Care, Department of Family Medicine at McMaster University have developed a ***Continuous Palliative Sedation Therapy Protocol For COVID-19 Pandemic.***

<https://fhs.mcmaster.ca/palliativecare/documents/McMasterPalliativeSedationProtocolCOVID31March2020.pdf>

A group of emergency physicians and palliative care physicians have also developed a more in-depth guidance document ***End-of-life care in the Emergency Department for the patient imminently dying of a highly transmissible acute respiratory infection (such as COVID-19).*** It is available on the Canadian Association of Emergency Physicians website: <https://caep.ca/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/EOL-in-COVID19-v5.pdf>

The above three resources are applicable to multiple care settings. Guidance within these resources should always be considered in the context of any current local Infection Prevention and Control (IPAC) guidance and/or policies, which may differ.

Note: There are reports that patients with COVID-19 may deteriorate quickly and have rapid progression of symptoms. Consulting with local palliative care specialists may be helpful for guidance.

Leveraging Virtual Care to Support Palliative Care

For individuals that can be managed in the community, virtual care options – telephone, virtual visits, text messaging – may be beneficial and efficient. The OPCN has developed [Leveraging Virtual Care to Support Palliative Care](#) to share some considerations to help providers determine when virtual care may be leveraged to provide ongoing palliative care.

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Support for Health Care Professionals

- The Government of Ontario has compiled resources to support health care workers cope with stress related to COVID-19, including links to self-led support, support with peers, and support with clinicians: <https://www.ontario.ca/page/covid-19-support-people#support-health-care-worker>
- The Government of Ontario is also currently offering free mental health support through [MindBeacon's Therapist Guided Program](#) to help address stress and mental wellbeing concerns during COVID-19. The service includes customized support for frontline healthcare workers.
- The Centre for Addiction and Mental Health provides access to mental health and addiction supports for health care workers impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes access to resources, psychotherapy and psychiatric services. <https://www.camh.ca/en/health-info/mental-health-and-covid-19/information-for-professionals>
- The Center to Advance Palliative Care has compiled Emotional PPE resources to improve team health and tools to help clinicians cope with moral distress, grief, and trauma. <https://www.capc.org/covid-19/emotional-ppe/>
- The Canadian Psychological Association has produced a fact sheet for *Emotional and Psychological Challenges Faced by Frontline Health Care Providers during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. https://cpa.ca/docs/File/Publications/FactSheets/PW_COVID-19_FrontLineHealthCareProviders.pdf

Additional Resources

- The OPCN has a Palliative Care Toolkit with best-practice tools to support primary care providers with palliative care delivery: <https://www.ontariopalliativecarenetwork.ca/resources/palliative-care-toolkit>
- The Centre for Effective Practice has developed clinical and practical COVID-19 guidance for primary care providers, which includes a specific section on Primary Care and Palliation: <https://tools.cep.health/tool/covid-19/#managing-covid-19-primary-care-and-palliation-new>
- Canadian Virtual Hospice has compiled links on COVID-19 for providers and the public, which includes a comprehensive listing of grief and loss support resources: http://www.virtualhospice.ca/covid19/#grief_and_loss
- The Regional Geriatric Program of Toronto has collated clinical guidance, tools, and links for health providers caring for older adults during the COVID-19 Pandemic. <https://www.rgptoronto.ca/resources/covid-19/>
- Hospice Palliative Care Ontario hosted a series of webinars at the beginning of the pandemic for health care workers/health service providers to discuss emotional, spiritual and compassionate care during COVID-19, and provide an opportunity for mutual support. The audio files are available here: <https://www.hpco.ca/grief-and-bereavement-supports-for-health-care-workers/>
- The University Health Network has collated various palliative care and COVID-19 resources, including articles, guidelines, videos, and webinars. <https://guides.hsict.library.utoronto.ca/c.php?g=715971>

Palliative Care Resources to Support Frontline Providers during the COVID-19 Pandemic

- The Center to Advance Palliative Care has created a Rapid Response Resources Hub that covers important areas for palliative care teams and for clinicians caring for patients with serious illness in the context of the United States health care system: <https://www.capc.org/toolkits/covid-19-response-resources/>
- Oxford University Press has published *A Field Manual for Palliative Care in Humanitarian Crises*, that is free to access online, and is available here: <https://oxfordmedicine.com/view/10.1093/med/9780190066529.001.0001/med-9780190066529>

Palliative Care Education

There are various **educational offerings** available to build capacity among providers:

- Pallium Canada offers [Learning Essentials Approaches to Palliative Care](#) (LEAP), a suite of interprofessional courses and workshops that address generalist-level competencies for health care professionals working in different settings.
 - Pallium, in collaboration with the Canadian Medical Association (CMA), is providing free access to two COVID-specific palliative care modules for all health care professionals. The modules are self-directed and available as a recorded webinar or in PowerPoint format. They can be accessed by logging in to [Pallium Central](#) and clicking on the COVID-19 palliative care resources icon.
 - Thanks to the Bridging HOPE partnership, a series of webinars were hosted on topics relevant to health care teams who are working to implement a palliative care approach across care settings. All webinar recordings, PowerPoint presentation slides, and additional resources can be accessed here: <https://www.pallium.ca/palliative-care-resources/>
- The de Souza eLearning centre offers Interprofessional Education in Palliative and End-of-Life Care (iEPEC-O), a self-directed online course that covers a comprehensive curriculum in palliative and end-of-life care topics, including core competencies in symptom management, ethical issues and communication skills in palliative care. Find out more here: <https://my.desouzainstitute.com/courseCodes/view/EOLC>
- The Palliative Pain and Symptom Management Consultants (PPSMCs) provide secondary-level hospice palliative care expertise through consultation, coordination, collaboration, facilitation, education, skill development, research and evaluation. <http://www.pccnetwork.ca/> Typically, PPSMCs offer a variety of interdisciplinary courses at the local and regional level.