10 tips for understanding how palliative care can help people with cancer

1. Palliative care provides an extra layer of support for anyone living with cancer: you may receive palliative care at any age and at any stage of cancer illness and at the same time as receiving treatment for the cancer.

2. Palliative care is not the same as hospice (which is care for people who are usually in the last 6 months of life); it is not reserved for the end of life.

3. Palliative care focuses on the person with cancer AND on the person’s family/support system, since cancer affects you and those who care about you.

4. Palliative care improves quality of life and wellness by helping symptoms caused by the cancer as well as symptoms caused by treatments for cancer.

5. Palliative care is “whole person” care: your physical, emotional, and spiritual comfort all contribute to your quality of life.

6. You do not have to tolerate pain! Untreated pain may decrease appetite, interrupt normal sleep, and even cause depression. Always tell your treatment team if you are experiencing pain.

7. Not all treatments for symptoms are medication: your team will help you explore effective treatments (like acupuncture, massage, meditation, physical therapy, counseling) to find the combination that works best for you.

8. A big part of whole person care is understanding what matters most to you and what your goals for treatment are. Ask about Advance Care Planning.

9. Studies show that people with serious cancers who receive early palliative care may live longer, as well as have better quality of life!

10. You may qualify for palliative care services at home...ask your team!