

Many People With Advanced Cancer Receive Treatment Unaligned With Their Goals

Doctors often go against patient wishes for comfort-focused care when treating advanced illnesses, finds a new study.

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Many people with advanced cancer report receiving unwanted [treatment](#) focused on extending their lives rather than easing their [pain](#), according to a new study [published in Cancer](#).

The goal of advanced cancer treatment is generally to increase longevity and [quality of life](#). Some people with advanced cancer, however, prefer to prioritize comfort over treatment.

A new study surveyed nearly 1,100 people with severe diseases who require advanced care planning. About 21% had advanced cancer; the rest had other serious illnesses, according to a Wiley [press release](#).

About 49% of those with advanced cancer and 48% of those with other life-threatening illnesses preferred comfort-focused care. Despite this, about 37% of people with cancer reported receiving care aimed at extending their lives compared with 19% of people with other serious illnesses.

What's more, life-extending care did not make a significant difference in those who didn't want to receive it.

"This disconnect between what patients want and what they feel they're getting is an important issue," said lead author Manan P. Shah, MD, of the University of California, Los Angeles, in the release.

Despite efforts to improve the quality of end-of-life care in the United States, existing studies have

emphasized issues in communication between patients and providers.

In fact, a [study published earlier this year](#) revealed that close to half of people with advanced cancer received potentially aggressive care at the end of their lives instead of supportive care.

“When treating advanced cancer, the goal is to help patients live as long and as well as possible. But sometimes, patients and oncologists face tough choices, especially when the goals of living longer and staying comfortable begin to compete with one another,” Shah said.

The study surveyed 4,074 oncologists and found that most were reluctant to discuss care goals with patients with advanced cancer who appeared well, had no symptoms or had not exhausted all treatment options. Researchers encourage providers to be more straightforward with patients.

“One takeaway is that doctors need to have open conversations with patients about their goals, clearly explain the intent of the treatment they are providing and try to reconcile any real or perceived discordance between goals and treatment,” Shah said.

For more, read Cancer Health’s [Special Report on Cancer and Quality of Life](#). The special issue features informative articles such as “[Cancer and Quality of Life: How to Stand Up for Yourself](#)” and “[Cancer and Quality of Life: Palliative Care](#).”

To learn more, click [#Quality of Life](#) or [#Palliative Care](#). There, you’ll see headlines such as “[For Young People with Advanced Cancer, Study Finds Serious Communication Gaps about Their Care](#),” “[Early Palliative Care Remains Underused Among Patients With Advanced Cancer](#)” and “[When Less Is More: Trends in Cancer Treatment](#).”