

University of New Mexico Hospital – Palliative Care

Each situation, each family, is unique. Being open and respectful, and seeking permission, goes a long way.

- The University of New Mexico (UNM) Hospital’s Palliative Care program began with two physicians, one of whom is a former Indian Health Service director, who were career advocates in end-of-life care and recognized palliative care as an emerging academic field.
- UNM Palliative Care began as an educational project through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation’s Palliative Care Project. From 2002 to 2005, groundbreaking efforts were successfully made to initiate administrative support from UNM Hospital.
- In 2006, UNM Hospital officially announced hospice and palliative medicine as an official sub-specialty medical service.

Successes and Innovations

- The palliative care program chose to align program work with the hospital’s mission through education. UNM medical students’ diversity curriculum currently uses the program’s guide on end-of-life conversations with Native American patients and families, who make up 12% of the hospital’s patients.
- The program measures the program’s progress through data collection. The program established patient and family follow-up policy to determine their quality of care. One measurement method includes the results of a bereavement follow-up survey for patients’ families.

Operated by: UNM Hospital

Established: 2006

Location: Albuquerque, New Mexico

Area served: The greater Albuquerque area

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<http://medicine.unm.edu/academic-divisions/palliative-care/index.html>

Mission Statement:

- Provide outstanding clinical care and leadership to improve quality of life (physical, emotional, spiritual, and cultural) for patients and families dealing with life-threatening illnesses;
- Treat patients, families, colleagues, and trainees with compassion, respect, and with an appreciation of diversity;
- Educate the current and future generations of clinicians to care for patients with advanced illnesses;
- Advance the field of palliative care through research; and
- Collaborate with local, state, and national organizations to improve palliative care services in New Mexico.



Best Practices in Culturally Sensitive End-of-Life Care

Program Profile: UNM Palliative Care

Incorporating Culture

- Because every tribe has their own culture, customs, and perspectives on end-of-life care, UNM Palliative Care works to actively engage and pursue partnerships with surrounding Native American communities.
- UNM Palliative Care begins each patient consultation with respect, curiosity, and a genuine interest in the family's perspective, which may require using a translator, third-person descriptions, a tribal consult, or other techniques to ensure full understanding.
- UNM Palliative Care has found patient and family situations to be tense and highly emotional. Having Native staff guide these sensitive conversations reduces the chance of misunderstandings.

“We're looking to build a relationship with the patient and the family and having the providers be in a more humble situation where the providers ask the patient to educate them on their culture or tradition.”

-Venita Wolfe, MS, Palliative Care Program, Education Specialist

Administration, Staffing & Facility

UNM Palliative Care is based out of University of New Mexico Hospital, the state's only level-one trauma center, and consists of doctors, nurses, pharmacists, social workers, artists, and a chaplain.

Funding

- The program bills for service like any other medical specialty.
- UNM hospital helps to support some of the palliative program staff salary as they recognize the cost savings of reducing emergent care.
- Some program funding comes from grants.

Lessons Learned

- Use available local and regional resources.
- Understand your program's needs within its setting, whether it is a hospital, clinic, or nursing home.
- Find a champion who understands your program and can work it into the fabric of the institution.
- Reach out for help; ask questions.
- Understand that palliative work is more than medical, it is spiritual and emotional.

Future Directions

In January 2015, UNM Palliative Care will be its own geriatric division under the UNM Hospital's Department of Medicine. The program hopes to do more palliative care education and outreach in the southwestern states while serving as a resource for the region.