Palliative Care For Parkinson’s Disease Patients

Parkinson’s disease damages the central nervous system in a progressively worsening manner. The nerve damage, along with the loss of an important neurotransmitter called dopamine, adversely affects brain activity and control resulting in patients having difficulties with a variety of normal body processes. Symptoms include stiffness, slow movement, unsteady gait, tremors, jerking, pain, low blood pressure, brain fog, dementia, anxiety, depression, fatigue and nausea.

Although no cure currently exists for Parkinson’s disease, there are many treatment methods that help to reduce existing symptoms and prevent new ones. One of the most important methods for approaching treatment is palliative care.

Palliative Care Information

Patient quality of life decreases over time as the disease progresses. Those who conduct palliative care work as a support team to provide overall relief. They help a patient gain the best quality of life possible through a focused interdisciplinary plan. Palliative care workers don’t merely treat physical symptoms. They also attempt to relieve stress, teach coping skills and improve the lives of a patient’s family members and caregivers.

A palliative care team is made up of a variety of medical professionals beyond the patient’s primary care provider, such as nurses, in-home aides, specialists and social workers. This team works with you to craft a custom treatment plan that addresses your current symptoms, challenges and goals.

Palliative care is available to patients of any age and background. You don’t need to be in the end stage of
Parkinson’s disease to receive assistance. In fact, it’s better if you receive palliative care as soon after diagnosis as possible.

Benefits of Palliative Care

Although Parkinson’s disease causes many life changes, you can still have some control over how these changes impact you. Your palliative care team starts by discussing with you and your caregiver the most likely future outcomes. They then address any concerns you have about different symptoms and ask you about your personal goals. Afterward, they outline the types of available short-term and long-term treatment and care options that they believe can help you to live a fuller life.

There are many treatments that help slow the progression of Parkinson’s disease while improving symptoms, including:

- **Traditional Therapies:** General physical therapy addresses movement concerns and aids in the prevention of muscle wasting. Speech therapy helps with speech, chewing and swallowing difficulties. Occupational therapy deals with motor skills and self-care. Psychological treatment helps with cognitive and mental health problems.

- **Deep Brain Stimulation:** A pacemaker helps control the electrical system of the heart. DBS works provides a similar benefit: A surgeon implants electrodes in your brain and a small device sends electric pulses into it to block any abnormal nervous symptom signals that cause certain symptoms.

- **Prescription Medicine:** A variety of drugs can help with individual symptoms. For example, carbidopa and Levodopa help restore dopamine levels. Lorazepam and similar drugs help with anxiety and muscle tension.

Your palliative care team can help you adapt the treatment plan as new symptoms occur, such as eating difficulties and
cognitive decline. Treatments might involve feeding tubes, full-time in-home care or an assisted living facility care.

Setting Up Palliative Care

A doctor can provide a referral to discuss palliative care in a variety of locations, including your home, an outpatient clinic or a local hospital. It’s never too late to seek out palliative care. For more information, or to find a local palliative care provider, contact our organization today.