New Agrace Service Helps Patients Receiving Curative Care  
By Andrea Wipperfurth, RN, Manager of Admissions & Palliative Care

You may regularly see patients who struggle with discomfort and stress from a chronic or serious illness, despite trying multiple standard treatments. They could benefit from comfort care, but are not eligible for hospice because they are either still receiving curative care or not clearly in the last six months of life—or both. **Now there’s a new way to help these patients cope better.**

For 35 years, Agrace has been the community’s nonprofit hospice. But our specialty—pain and symptom management—is also beneficial to patients with serious illnesses who are *not* the end of life. Our innovative, new community-based **Palliative Care Consultation Service** addresses this need.

An Agrace palliative care consult is a one-time home visit* from a nurse practitioner (NP) who specializes in palliative medicine. The visit supplements your care; its purpose is to generate recommendations for relieving uncontrolled physical symptoms or emotional stress related to any chronic or serious illness.

**How the service works:** Upon referral and after obtaining approval from the patient’s primary care provider (PCP), an Agrace NP visits the patient where they live—at home or in a long-term care (LTC) facility. The NP conducts a physical assessment and has an open discussion with the patient about their symptoms, medications and other therapies to determine how well current treatments are working for symptom management. They may also discuss goals for care, what’s interfering with the patient’s ability to meet those goals, advance care planning and what to expect as the illness progresses.

Based on what is learned during the consult, the Agrace NP makes recommendations for the patient and their PCP (and facility staff, for LTC residents) to consider. **Agrace does not direct any changes or take over the patient’s care.**

For example, Agrace recently visited a 63-year-old woman with chronic pain issues and weakness. We discussed her pain, her current and past medications and many modalities of pain treatment. **We learned that she was not using medications correctly, and found a discrepancy between what she was taking and what was on her medication list.** Working with her family, Agrace recommended a new, comprehensive pain management strategy that was approved by her physician and is now in place.

**Who could benefit?** Patients of any age, with any serious illness, including diseases of the heart, liver, kidneys or lungs; cancer; rheumatoid arthritis; lupus; HIV/AIDS; MS; Parkinson’s disease, ALS, stroke and dementia. Think of your patients who:

- have progressive illness despite treatment or aggressive interventions
- have missed appointments due to physical symptoms or functional decline
- frequently report having uncontrolled pain or other symptoms
- have had repeat hospitalizations/ER visits due to unmanaged symptoms

*Patients must qualify for a home visit based on medical necessity.*  

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Palliative Care, continued

- would benefit from a discussion about goals of care and what's important to them
- do not clearly qualify for other services, including hospice

How do you access this service? Call Agrace at (800) 930-2770. If someone other than the patient's PCP makes the referral, Agrace will contact the PCP and get their approval before making a consult visit. A physician's order will be obtained and provided to the facility prior to a palliative care consult for a resident of a skilled nursing facility.

Questions? Please call (800) 930-2770 or email us at pcconsult@agrace.org. You can also refer to the helpful comparison chart enclosed with this newsletter.

Coaching Service Helps Prevent Hospitalizations

In addition to our new Palliative Care Consult Service, Agrace offers an ongoing “coaching” service that's designed to help your seriously ill patients who are not eligible for hospice.

Agrace Care Navigation helps people manage a chronic or serious illness more confidently at home with ongoing guidance and education from an Agrace registered nurse. Following an initial in-home assessment, Agrace Care Navigation's RN care manager develops a customized care plan for the patient. The service includes 24/7 phone support, help with medication management, coordination of doctor visits and more.

For a reasonable monthly fee, this valuable service can improve a patient’s overall health and reduce the likelihood of expensive emergency room visits and hospitalizations. Care Navigation is an extra layer of support that is especially helpful for patients who do not have family caregivers nearby. For details, visit agrace.org/care-navigation or call (608) 327-7117.

Agrace Adds Three Palliative Care Specialists

Patrick Bertz, FNP-BC, has joined Agrace with 29 years' experience as an RN and 17 years as a nurse practitioner. He is board-certified as a family nurse practitioner and retired from active military duty. While working in hospitals, he saw many times when patients lost quality and comfort at the end of their lives. He says, “I hope to help people focus on what is important to them and provide comfort and symptom management at the end of their life.”

Patricia Lohr, APNP, recently joined Agrace after working as a nurse practitioner for seven years with Dean Health System and Care Wisconsin, where she cared for frail elderly patients and people with disabilities. A nurse for 36 years, she also has experience managing care in nursing homes. With Agrace, Pat specializes in conducting palliative care consults in the community. “I love the in-home visits,” she says. “You’re meeting people where they are, and really seeing their needs.”

Kim M. Kinsley, DO, joined Agrace in May with extensive experience in family practice, geriatrics, and hospice and palliative medicine. A graduate of Michigan State University, Dr. Kinsley has worked primarily in private practice in Michigan and Colorado. She became board certified in hospice and palliative medicine in 2000. “As an osteopath, you are born and bred in the holistic attitude of healing,” Dr. Kinsley explains. “My approach is to treat all my patients like VIPs—like family.”

Service Area Expands to Iowa, Sauk and Columbia Counties

Agrace is now serving patients in 31 communities in Iowa, Sauk and Columbia counties. To refer a patient who lives in those counties, please call Agrace at (800) 930-2770.