

# The Potential Role for Palliative Care in Mass Casualty Events

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Palliative care uses the skills from multiple disciplines to enhance quality of life and address the needs of seriously ill patients and their families based on evidence-based medical treatment, vigorous symptom relief, and humanitarian care when there is nothing else to offer [31]. Palliative care respects the humanity of those who will die soon and assures their comfort while supporting their loved ones [32]. Under normal circumstances, palliative care plays a complementary role to comprehensive medical care focused on cure or control of an underlying life-threatening disease. Under the dire circumstances of an MCE, disaster-related palliative care would, at a minimum, involve the aggressive management of symptoms and the relief of patient suffering, including the obvious humanitarian call to relieve the psycho-social, spiritual, and religious suffering of patients likely to die. Unusually aggressive means of symptom management are, at times, appropriate at the end of life in the same way that extraordinary means of saving life are often appropriate during curative phases of medical therapy [33,34]. Moreover, the incorporation of palliative care into MCE disaster response may also greatly help reassure the public that society and its health care professionals will not “abandon” the patient or deliberately “cause death” under dire MCE circumstances, as was alleged during Hurricane Katrina [28,29].

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