

# Palliative Care Services At Agape Healthcare Provide Support For People With Chronic Illness

by Jeannette Moninger

*If you or a loved one is living with a chronic disease that affects the ability to enjoy life, a palliative care specialist can help.*

“Palliative care is a medical discipline focused on helping people who have a chronic, and sometimes terminal, condition manage symptoms and improve quality of life,” says Liz Wambugu, a certified adult gerontology nurse practitioner and palliative care provider with Agape Healthcare. Based in Greenwood Village, Agape provides palliative and hospice care services for residents throughout the metro-Denver area.

As a palliative care specialist, Wambugu works in partnership with primary care physicians and oncologists, neurologists, cardiologists and other specialists to alleviate symptoms brought on by a disease or its treatments. “Helping a patient reduce and manage pain is one of the top requests we get,” says Wambugu. “But I also address other issues like shortness of breath, fatigue and nausea.” Wambugu educates both patients and loved ones about the disease and treatments. She reviews medical records, including medications, to determine the best approach to resolving a patient’s issues.

Many people who seek palliative care have long-term illnesses, such as Parkinson’s disease, multiple sclerosis or Alzheimer’s disease. Some have acute ailments like cancer. “A chronic illness affects the whole family,” says Wambugu. “Palliative care serves as a supportive, educational resource to ease the burden of everyone who is affected.”

Wambugu engages in ongoing communication with patients about their desired care goals. “The steps that someone wants to take today to manage symptoms may change in a month or two as the disease progresses,” says Wambugu. “I help patients understand their care options.” Wambugu also works with family, helping them assess when a patient might need extra services, such as home health care or assisted living.

Most private insurers, as well as Medicaid and Medicare, cover the costs of palliative care services. To receive services, a patient



Liz Wambugu

needs a physician’s referral. Wambugu visits patients at their homes or in care centers. Because she often sees patients more frequently than physicians, she can quickly detect when a patient isn’t doing well and get them the care they need to help avoid hospitalization.

“Many people mistakenly believe that palliative care is end-of-life care,” says Wambugu. “We support patients and their families as a disease progresses. Our services focus on life and improving the quality of that life.”