help dementia patients live and die with dignity

By 2030, 80,000 Singaporeans are expected to have the disease. Many suffer in silence amid poor quality of life. Palliative care in advanced dementia can help.

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For The Straits Times

The programmes build on existing partnerships and collaborations with dementia and palliative care specialists. Disease-based, task-force specific, the programmes evaluates patient comfort and care well-being through internationally validated dementia-specific measures. Assessments are not able to clearly articulate the patient’s symptoms, the programme uses such factors as expression, body language, communication, and pain to evaluate the patient’s condition. Caregiver support and engagement in decision-making processes are important to ensure quality of life.

Caregivers are very valuable members of the team, helping patients to navigate through their illness. The programme provides supportive care to caregivers and families. This is done through individualised care plans, emotional support and referrals to other professionals. Care plans are developed in collaboration with the patient, caregivers and families. Caregivers are referred to the homecare team by the hospice. With this support, patients can have a dignified death at home. In addition, non-threatening environment, minimising distress, lowered patient suffering and emotional needs are often unmet, which is an important role for the hospice.

The challenge is in providing such services to the community. Palliative care is complex, requiring specialist training. In Singapore, there is a lack of resources and funding in the community to make these models work.

The current plan shows the need for more investment in palliative care. Regrettably, such plans are not implemented on a national scale. The programme does not have the capacity to serve all Singaporeans. While the number of palliative care beds has increased, there is still a huge gap in access to services.

Caregivers and patients are often isolated and stigmatised. Despite the national efforts, there is a lack of awareness and understanding among the general public.

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