

# Health Plan of San Joaquin's Palliative Care Options Expands

## *HPSJ's Early Start to 2018 State Mandate*

A palliative care program within a San Joaquin General Hospital clinic was set up by HPSJ and its partner, SJGH, in September 2016, with partial funding from a California Health Care Foundation grant. That program now provides patient-and family-centered care for HPSJ patients with end-stage liver disease, advanced cancer, end-stage congestive heart failure or end-stage chronic pulmonary disease. With support from HPSJ's Medical Management team, SJGH offers patients and their families' four options: home visits from certified nurses, hospital outpatient clinic visits, a telephone care program with a certified social worker or any combination of these.

SJGH Palliative Care Clinic Director, Dr. Syung M. Jung, said: "This is holistic care that closes gaps in our health care system. The whole-person care team brings many disciplines, but it is completely united to focus on this one patient and their unique physical, emotional and spiritual needs. The growing ability to offer local palliative care began as a partnership with HPSJ and is now widening local collaboration."

### **Building on success**

With an additional CHCF grant for staff education, outreach, program development, oversight and evaluation, in July of this year, HPSJ launched a pilot project for outpatient palliative care. Offering in-home consultation and 24/7 telephonic support through SJGH and two of HPSJ's palliative

care agency partners, this pilot project, called HPSJ Palliative Care Options, expands local care expertise and capacity for this important branch of medicine.

HPSJ's partner agencies, in addition to the original partners at San Joaquin General Hospital, are Transitions Palliative Care, a service of Hospice of San Joaquin (San Joaquin County) and Community Care Choices - Palliative Care Program of Community Hospice (Stanislaus County). HPSJ, which is funding the cost of this pilot project for clinical services, elected to offer outpatient palliative care services for HPSJ members as a head start to a larger, state focused palliative care effort. Such care will be a new Medi-Cal member benefit, starting in 2018.

"There are HPSJ patients with chronic illnesses. We provide care for them in these different ways. But there does come a point where they are heading toward the end stage of the illness," said HPSJ's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Lakshmi Dhanvanthari.

"What we are providing, in addition to the various aggressive interventions they are receiving, is comfort care and symptom management. These are offered by a specialized team of experienced, caring health care professionals, and offering support in ways that are tailored to the patient's family traditions and cultures," said Dr. Dhanvanthari.

HPSJ's Cultural and Linguistics



Manager Jenny Dominguez is working with all of the pilot partners to ensure that culturally sensitive communications are built into this patient-centric initiative. She said, "We all are committed to offering consistent, caring messages, at the same time we are getting both the patient and their family the support they need."

Palliative Care refers to patient- and family-centered care that optimizes quality of life by anticipating, preventing and treating suffering. Palliative care throughout the continuum of ill-

ness involves addressing physical, intellectual, emotional and social, as well as spiritual needs. Such care can be provided concurrently with curative care. Medi-Cal member benefit, starting in early 2018.

### **Hospice Care is very different**

Hospice supports a delivery system geared to patients with limited life expectancy who are in the terminal state of an illness. While assisting patients, and family members, with a limited life expectancy, this care helps patients and family members cope as death nears.