BY RUSSELL K. PORTENOY

The American Hospital Association, 20 percent of hospitals now have palliative care services.

Most of the 2.5 million people who have incurable diseases, such as cancer, AIDS, or diseases such as multiple sclerosis, lupus, juvenile rheumatoid arthritis, and cystic fibrosis, could benefit from palliative care. For those with less than six months to live, “Palliative care makes the rest of life worth living,” said Ronald Schonwetter, a professor at the University of South Florida College of Medicine.

“The doctor was able to control her pain. We were able to talk about the end of life, to express fears and continuing concerns, without being driven by medical considerations,” said Dr. Meneghello during the 18 months his wife, Madeleine Corbett, struggled with lung cancer.

Corbett decided against having a walker, a feeding tube, or any other treatment. “I didn’t want to know how much longer I had to live,” she said. “I just wanted to spend time with John.”

As part of the palliative care team at New York’s Beth Israel Hospital, Dr. Laura Shaiova provided guidance to Corbett and her family. Palliative care can include medication and counseling. Palliative Care includes symptom management, advice on living wills and advance directives, and support for family members.

Experts agree that progress will be slow, and that doctors have difficulty with this type of care. “And just as important, the team and their families need a type of care that helps them move through the process and understand how it can be,” said Dr. Laura Shaiova, specialist in the Department of Pain Medicine and Palliative Care at Beth Israel Medical Center.

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