



**Mid North Coast Rural Palliative Care Project –  
Link Nurse Education 2005**

# **Delivering a Palliative Approach in aged care**

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# Learning Outcome

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- Demonstrate a knowledge of the principles and philosophies of a palliative approach in residential aged care.
- Identifies the role and needs of the aged care team when implementing a palliative approach

# What is Palliative Care?

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- Definition World Health Organisation (WHO) 2002
- *An approach that improves the quality of life of **individuals and their families** facing the problem associated with life-threatening illness, through the **prevention and relief of suffering** by means of **early identification** and **impeccable assessment** and treatment of pain and other problems , physical, psychological and spiritual.*

# Importance of WHO definition

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- Any life threatening illness;
- Clear inclusion of families;
- "Prevention" - not just simply reacting to crises or symptoms but having a preventative role;
- "Early identification" (v's the deathbed consultation, and not just when all active therapy has ceased);
- Robust term "impeccable" - not just good, reasonable or excellent.

# Diseases of ageing

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- Symptomatic congestive cardiac failure
- Chronic lung disease
- Dementia – Cognitive impairment
- Stroke
- Cancer
- Recurrent infection
- Degenerative joint disease
- Frailty

# Recognising Transition Markers

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## **Disease - independent**

- Frailty syndrome
- From independence to dependence
- Cognitive impairment
- Symptom distress
- Increasing family support needs

# Frailty Syndrome Defined

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*A state of extreme vulnerability to a range of poor outcomes*

(Walton and Fried, 2003, p.93)

- Final common pathway for many end-stage & chronic diseases
- A biological process – age related, can be independent of other co-morbidities

# Evidence of Frailty Syndrome

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- ↑ Dependence on family & care-givers
- ↑ Burden of symptoms
- ↑ Medical/nursing and social needs
  - Repeated falls and injuries
  - Disability
  - Susceptibility to acute illness
  - Poor ability to recover stressors

Co-morbidities

Integrated-Simultaneous Model

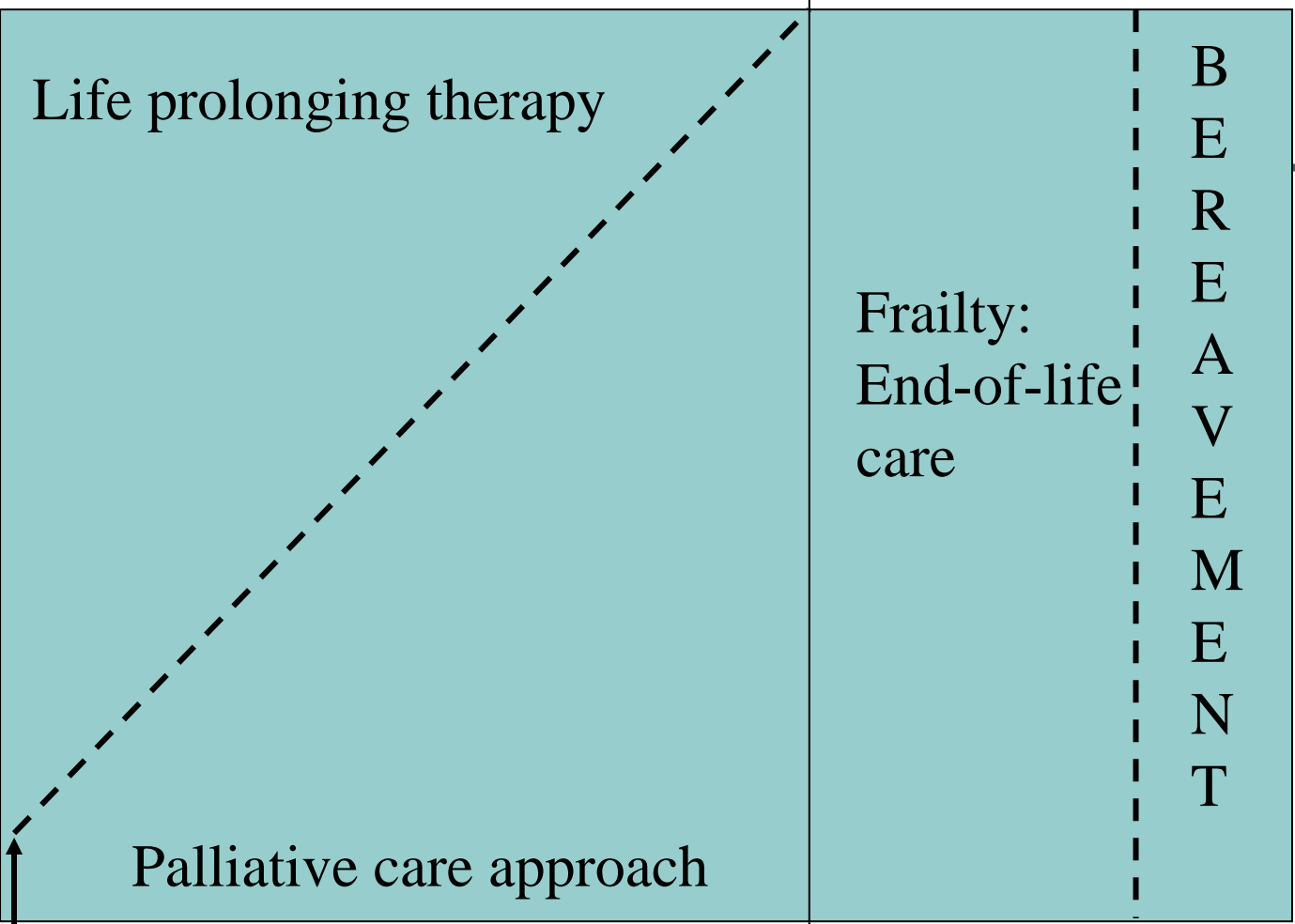
Life prolonging therapy

Frailty:  
End-of-life  
care

Palliative care approach

B  
E  
R  
E  
A  
V  
E  
M  
E  
N  
T

Diagnosis of serious illness



# Palliative Approach

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- A palliative approach aims to improve the quality of life for older people with a life limiting illness and their families, by reducing their suffering through early identification, assessment and treatment of pain, physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs (Kristjanson *et al.* 2003).

# Palliative Approach

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Adoption a palliative approach focuses care on:

- improving quality of life, including symptom control, dignity and comfort for the older person
- acknowledges the needs of family
- can be initiated well before the terminal stages of illness
- most appropriate approach for care for older people in residential aged care facilities

# Palliative Approach

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- Extending beyond routine care
- Incorporating specific knowledge, attitudes and skills
- Establish a supportive relationship with specialist palliative care providers
- Involving family and friends

# Recognising Transition Marker!



*"Well, it's not a good sign, that's for sure ..."*

# Transitional Markers

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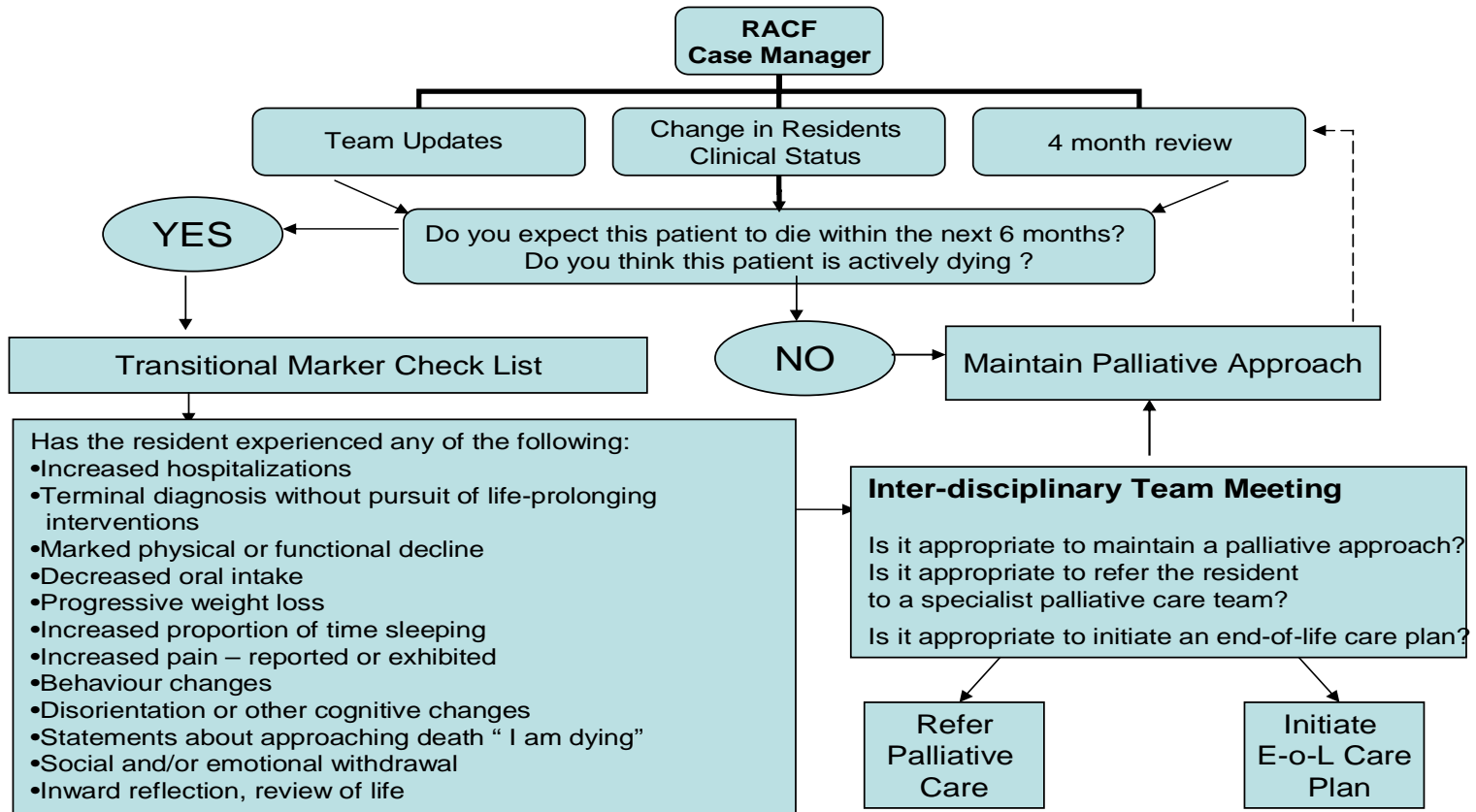
- Increased hospitalizations
- Terminal diagnosis without pursuit of life-prolonging interventions
- Marked physical or functional decline
- Decreased oral intake
- Progressive weight loss
- Increased proportion of time sleeping

# Transitional Markers

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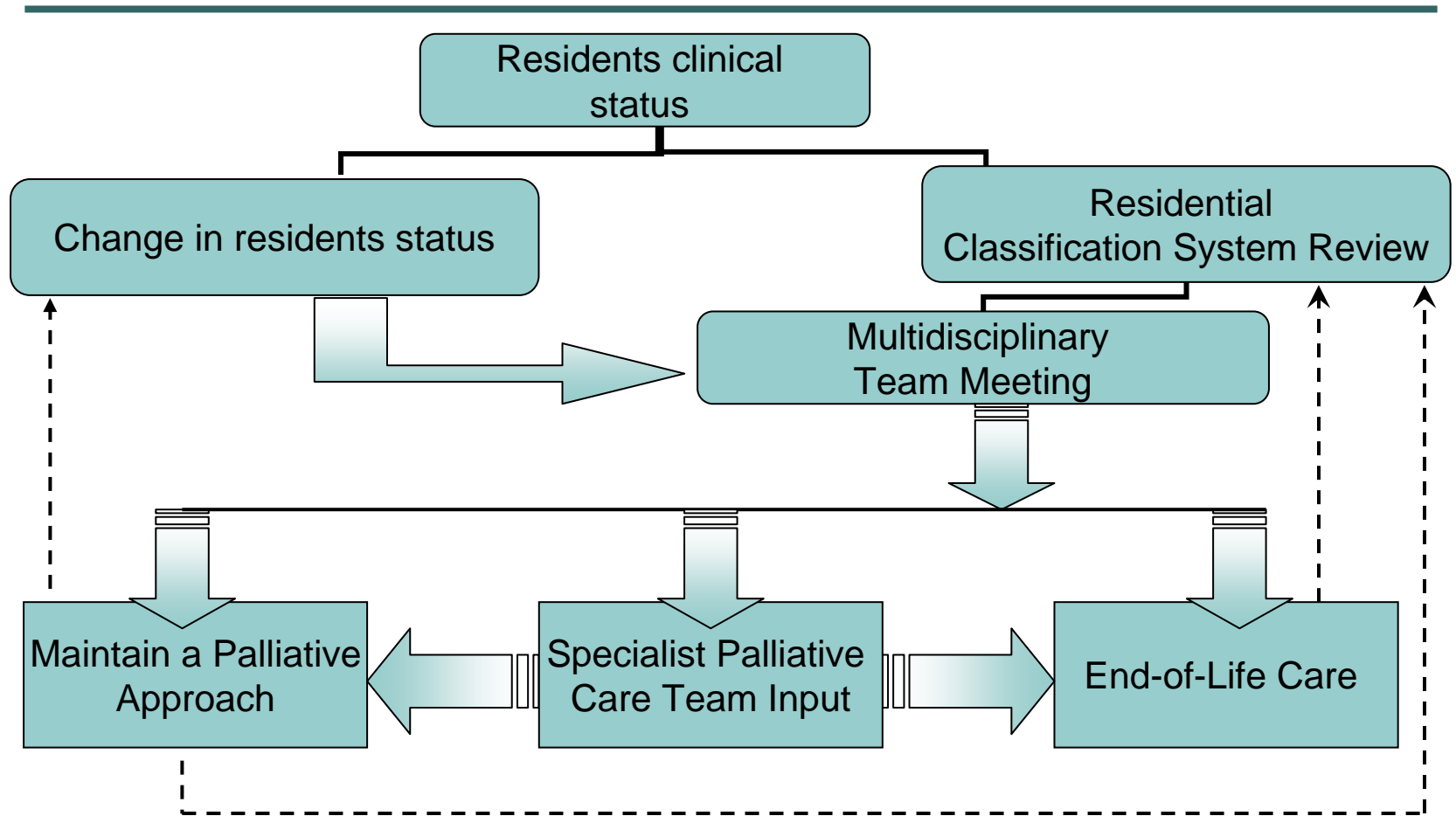
- Increased pain – reported or exhibited
- Behaviour changes
- Disorientation or other cognitive changes
- Statements about approaching death “ I am dying”
- Social and/or emotional withdrawal
- Inward reflection, review of life

# Checklist to Guide the Management of Palliative Care in RACF



Modified from: Kesler, T, C.,and Griffie, J. 2003. *Assessment of dying: A tool to help providers recognise imminent death.* American Journal of Nursing, 103 (11), 52-53

# Chart 1: Incorporating a multidisciplinary team approach into care planning in residential aged care facilities



## What is a palliative approach?

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- Implemented where residents condition is not amenable to cure.
- Where effective symptom management is required including active management when appropriate.
- Primary goal is to improve the residents level of comfort and address psychological, spiritual and social needs.