

## Physician Assistant Certificate in Palliative and Serious Illness Care

Physician assistants are trusted clinicians who provide compassionate, multifaceted care to patients and families at every stage of health, including through serious illness. Delivering care that targets the physical and emotional symptoms of advanced illness requires an extra level of skill and training.

This 12-week online instructor-led course prepares physician assistants in any practice setting to deliver high-quality care that effectively supports patients with advanced illnesses and their families.

You'll master evidence-based skills and strategies essential in primary palliative care including communication, advance care planning, prognostication, pain and symptom management, psychosocial-spiritual aspects of care, care at the end of life, and more.

### Program Details

- Interactive didactic online lessons, prepared by palliative care clinical leaders
- Course material available 24/7
- Supplemental live "Grand Rounds" sessions with your fellow students and an expert PA instructor
- Weekly assignments you complete on your own schedule
- Class size limited to 25 people
- About 5-7 hours per week spent on learning

### What You'll Learn

By the end of this course, you'll be able to:

- Understand the physician assistant's role in caring for patients with serious illness and their families
- Identify patients who need and could benefit from palliative care
- Communicate with seriously ill patients about their disease trajectory, using prognostication tools and resources
- Assess and treat the most common physical symptoms of serious disease, including pain and nausea
- Identify spiritual and psychosocial distress and connect patients with community resources
- Recognize cultural differences and practice radical respect when treating patients with serious illness
- Integrate palliative care services into your practice in any setting
- Establish billing processes and performance measures for palliative care services
- Use self-care strategies to build resilience and avoid burnout

### What You'll Earn

- The Doctors Company designates this activity for a maximum of 72.5 AMA PRA Category 1.0 Credits™. Physicians should claim only the credit commensurate with the extent of their participation in the activity. This activity has been planned and implemented in accordance with the accreditation requirements and policies of the Accreditation Council for Continuing Medical Education (ACCME) through the joint providership of The Doctors Company and the CSU Shiley Institute for Palliative Care. The Doctors Company is accredited by the ACCME to provide continuing medical education for physicians.
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### Who Should Take This Course?

Physician assistants who treat patients with advanced illnesses in:

- Primary care practices, including urgent care
- Hospice, home care, acute and long-term care settings
- Oncology, nephrology, cardiology
- All surgical specialties
- Critical Care settings: emergency and intensive care

### Total Investment

- \$1,450 for registration
- 12 weeks to complete program

# PALLIATIVE CARE EDUCATION. ANYTIME, ANYWHERE.

CSU The California State University

SHILEY INSTITUTE  
FOR PALLIATIVE CARE

## Physician Assistant Certificate in Palliative and Serious Illness Care

This 12-week instructor-led program features online coursework, interactive learning activities, case studies, and weekly live Grand Round sessions via Zoom that help you apply what you're learning to clinical settings.

### Week 1: Introduction to Primary Palliative Care

This course provides an overview of palliative care, including how it is delivered across a variety of settings and how to identify patients who could benefit from it. You will explore prognostication for disease trajectories in which palliative care can augment treatment plans, identify methods of prognostication, and discuss potential benefits and barriers.

### Week 2: Communication and Advance Care Planning

Effective provider-patient communication is key to primary care and palliative care. This course provides strategies to enhance communication with patients and families facing serious illnesses. You will build skills in advance care planning, evidence-based techniques for conducting difficult conversations, and legally binding forms to aid in documentation.

### Week 3: Physical Aspects of Care: Assessment

Careful assessment of symptoms is essential to uncovering aspects of patient discomfort that need to be addressed. This course explores common physical symptoms of serious illness, practical assessment tools, effective communication strategies that enhance assessment, and the importance of whole-person assessment in identifying and managing distressing symptoms.

### Week 4: Physical Aspects of Care: Pain Management

Pain is arguably the symptom of serious illness that requires first and most vigorous attention. This course covers types and dimensions of pain that can accompany advanced illness, as well as pharmacological and nonpharmacological interventions to relieve it. You will examine the use of opioids, including appropriate prescribing, how to assess risk, how to minimize side effects, and more.

### Week 5: Physical Aspects of Care: Constitutional, Cardiopulmonary

Dyspnea, cachexia, fatigue, and insomnia are common symptoms of serious illnesses. In this course you will identify interdisciplinary assessment tools for each symptom, as well as pharmacological and nonpharmacological approaches to managing them. You'll also explore cardiopulmonary conditions that can benefit from palliative care, how to assess symptoms at each stage of disease progression, and effective therapies to help manage them.

### Week 6: Physical Aspects of Care: GI, Emergency Conditions

Symptoms affecting gastrointestinal function can be particularly distressing for patients and families living with serious illnesses. This course describes causes and treatment options, including pharmacological and nonpharmacological therapies. You'll also examine signs, symptoms, and treatments for palliative emergencies.

### Week 7: Physical Aspects of Care: Psychiatric and Psychological Conditions

Psychiatric and psychological conditions including delirium, depression, and anxiety often affect people living with serious illnesses, yet are frequently missed by the care team. This course discusses how these conditions impact physical health, effective interdisciplinary assessment methods, and pharmacological and complementary approaches for symptom management.

### Week 8: Social Aspects of Care

Living with serious illness can be stressful for patients and families, creating psychosocial distress that impacts health and quality of life. In this course, you'll learn to assess how a patient is processing diagnosis or prognosis, adapting to changes in functional status, and/or coping with the prospect of dying. Social supports are also explored.

### Week 9: Spiritual Aspects of Care and Cultural Aspects of Care

Culture, faith, and spirituality are integral to how patients and families experience serious illnesses and must be integrated into the care plan. This course helps you recognize how belief systems affect people living with serious illnesses and how to approach spiritual and existential concerns. You'll also learn to differentiate between cultural competence, cultural humility, identify and neutralize implicit bias, and practice radical acceptance for difference.

### Week 10: Care of the Patient at the End of Life

The course covers key topics for caring for patients at the end of life. You'll explore the Medicare hospice benefit, communication skills needed to discuss end-of-life care and hospice care, how to document treatment preferences (e.g., in a POLST form), and clinical ethics and ethical decision-making for patients near the end of life.

### Week 11: Integrating Palliative Care into Practice

Providing palliative care support in a primary care setting is a practice decision, but also a business decision. This course will help you develop the business case for palliative care, including forecasting the patient pool and resources needed, achieving acceptance, measuring outcomes, and establishing reimbursement processes.

### Week 12: Self-Care

Practicing self-care is essential to combat burnout, moral distress, and team dysfunction, particularly when providing care to seriously ill patients. This course helps you recognize the warning signs of moral distress, identify your own beliefs and habits that may lead to burnout or compassion fatigue, and utilize tools for self-care and building resilience.