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Early access is key to living well with chronic illness

National Palliative Care Week this year focuses on *Living Well with Chronic Illness*, and aims to let people know that early access to palliative care can help people have a better quality of life.

South Western Sydney Local Health District's (SWSLHD) Director of Palliative Care, Janeane Harlum said palliative care allowed people to live the way they chose to, until they die.

"Palliative care is care that helps people live their life as fully and as comfortably as possible, when living with a life-limiting or terminal illness," Ms Harlum said.

"National Palliative Care Week provides a great opportunity for friends and family to encourage people with life-limiting conditions to make their end-of-life wishes known.

"Without knowing what our loved ones want we cannot advocate for them," she said.

Ms Harlum said SWSLHD offered a range of palliative care services.

"Specialist palliative care medical and nursing services are provided for patients at home, in hospital and at Residential Aged Care facilities, in partnership with GPs, specialist doctors, nursing and allied health staff.

"The PEACH program provides additional care and support for patients who wish to die at home. The package of care includes rapid access to additional care, increased nursing visits and support of the carer or family.

"Our wonderful network of trained palliative care volunteers are also available to support patients and their carer at home," Ms Harlum said.

Ms Harlum said four out of five deaths in Australia were caused by chronic illness, but there was a misconception that only cancer patients could access palliative care.

"People with chronic illnesses often have more than one condition which affects their health in different ways. It's important that people realise early access to palliative care can help them have a better quality of life," Ms Harlum said.

"Palliative care offers many things, including pain and symptom management, to give people as much time as possible as they live with their life limiting illness. Palliative care isn't just for the individual but also supports people like carers, friends and family," she said.

For more information about the SWSLHD Palliative Care Volunteer service, call the Volunteer Coordinator Arlene Roach on 87389755. National Palliative Care Week runs from 22-28 May 2016. More information is available at <http://palliativecare.org.au/national-palliative-care-week/>