Knight Cancer physician appointed to Oregon’s first Palliative Care Advisory Council

The OHSU Knight Cancer Institute’s palliative care medical director, Erik Fromme, M.D., and other expert advisors are shepherding a statewide effort to help people with serious illness live better. The Oregon Legislature recently passed Senate Bill 608 creating the Palliative Care and Quality of Life Interdisciplinary Advisory Council. The council seeks to improve the lives of all who would benefit from palliative care and facilitate access through better coordination of care.

Palliative care encompasses physical, emotional, and spiritual support for people at any stage of a serious illness. But many people who are seriously ill miss out on the benefits. Their doctors often wait too long to order it. Or they simply don’t refer patients for palliative care.

“Palliative care focuses on quality of life and that is important for every patient, not just those who are dying,” says Fromme. “Our goals in making palliative care a priority in public health are to help patients and families understand it and to help health systems provide it.”

Fromme, an associate professor in the Department of Radiation Medicine, is one of nine appointed to the statewide council. He worked on behalf of OHSU to urge support for the senate bill as a necessary step in making palliative care a priority in public health, and he lobbied in partnership with the American Cancer Society. Kathy Perko, M.S., P.N.P., director of the Bridges Palliative Care Program at Doernbecher Children’s Hospital, was also selected to the advisory board. Members represent medicine, nursing, social work, pharmacy, naturopathic medicine, clergy and health facilities administration.

In addition to establishing the advisory council, the legislation directs the Oregon Health Authority to establish palliative care requirements for health facilities and to disseminate palliative care information and resources via a website developed in consultation with the council.

The council expects to hold its first meeting in early 2016. More information can be found on the State of Oregon website.