

Palliative Care Doctor

Treat pain, breathlessness and fear in people with serious illness, and help them decide what happens next.

TYPICAL PAY

\$236,000

a year, full time

PAY RANGE

\$66k to \$239k

starting to experienced

TIME TO QUALIFY

12 to 14 years

after high school

DEMAND

Good

job outlook

LICENCE NEEDED

Yes

regulated job

WHERE YOU WORK

Hospital palliative care teams, hospices, cancer centers, home vi...

How you get there

- 1 High school** Grades 11 and 12
Biology, chemistry, physics, math and as much English as you can take. Half of this job is language.
- 2 Bachelor's degree** 4 years
Any major with the science prerequisites finished, a high GPA, and the medical college admission test.
- 3 Medical school** 4 years
Four years to an MD (doctor of medicine) or a DO (doctor of osteopathic medicine), passing the first national licensing exams along the way.
- 4 Residency in a base specialty** 3 to 5 years
Usually internal medicine or family medicine, but emergency medicine, anesthesiology, pediatrics, psychiatry, neurology and surgery all lead here too.
- 5 Hospice and palliative medicine fellowship** 1 year
A one-year fellowship accredited by the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, then the subspecialty board exam.

Pros and cons

- + Deeply meaningful work that patients and families remember
- + Mostly weekday hours with far less night call than other specialties
- + Teams are genuinely multidisciplinary, so you are never alone with a case
- Twelve years of training for pay below most specialties
- Constant exposure to death, including children in some jobs
- Other doctors sometimes call you too late, which is frustrating

Optional boosts

Pediatric palliative care. Hospice medical director. Academic and research work. Ethics consultation.

Good to know

Palliative care is not the same as hospice

Hospice is care for people expected to live months, usually at home, with treatment aimed at comfort. Palliative care can start on the day of diagnosis and run alongside chemotherapy, surgery or dialysis. Ev...

It is a young specialty

Hospice and palliative medicine was only recognized as a formal medical subspecialty in the United States in the 2000s. Many of the doctors who built it are still working, which is unusual in medicine.

Where these numbers come from

O*NET OnLine: Physicians, All Other (29-1229.00)
American Academy of Hospice and Palliative Medicine
Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education
United States Medical Licensing Examination

Numbers checked September 2026. Pay figures are typical full-time annual amounts in United States dollars, based on Bureau of Labor Statistics wage data and published pay scales. They vary by state, employer and experience. Tuition is for in-state students at public schools unless the card says otherwise. Sources, links and the click-through version: <https://career.help/us/careers/palliative-care-doctor>



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