

# Frail aged: Comfort over cure?

## 2 studies examine elderly's options

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Associated Press

LOS ANGELES — A surprising number of frail, elderly Americans in nursing homes are suffering from futile care at the end of their lives, two new federally funded studies reveal.

One found that putting nursing home residents with failing kidneys on dialysis didn't improve their quality of life and may even push them into further decline.

The other showed many

with advanced dementia will die within six months and perhaps should have hospice care instead of aggressive treatment.

Medical experts say the new research emphasizes the need for doctors, caregivers and families to consider making the feeble elderly who are near death comfortable rather than treating them as if a cure were possible.

The studies are published in Thursday's New England Journal of Medicine.

In one study, doctors looked at health records of 3,702 nursing home residents nationwide who started dialysis between 1998 and

2000. The average age was 73 and many had other health problems, including diabetes, heart disease and cancer.

Within the first year, 58 percent died and another 29 percent declined in their ability to do simple tasks such as walking, bathing and getting dressed.

The second study followed 323 people with advanced dementia from Boston-area nursing homes. Their average age was 85 and they could not recognize loved ones and were unable to talk or walk. One out of four died within six months and half died during the 18 months they were followed.

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