

caring
for those
you care about

Getting the Facts About Hospice

When people hear the word hospice, they may become frightened and confused. That's because there are many myths and misconceptions about what hospice is and what it can do for persons who are nearing the end of their lives.

Since our population is aging and the need for hospice services is continuing to grow, it is important to clear up the mystery of hospice. This Tip Sheet is designed to introduce you to hospice and to show you how hospice may help you and your loved ones during life's final journey.

What Is Hospice?

Hospice is a unique approach to caring for persons who are terminally ill. It involves a team of specially trained professionals who provide expert medical care, pain management, and emotional and spiritual support that is tailored to the individual patient's needs and wishes. Their focus is on caring not curing. In addition, recognizing the tremendous toll that illness takes on family members, the hospice team also provides compassionate comfort and support to the patient's loved ones, both during the illness and beyond.

Services are available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Originally introduced in England in the 1960s, the hospice philosophy is based on the belief that death is a natural part of life. It does not prolong life, nor does it hasten death. Hospice simply allows nature to take its course. Hospice's sole focus is on assisting the terminally ill to live life to the fullest during their final days.

Who Can Receive Hospice Care?

Hospice services are available to anyone regardless of illness, culture, age, gender, or financial status. The criteria for receiving hospice care are that the patient has a terminal illness, has been certified by a medical professional as having a prognosis of six months or less, and does not wish to pursue curative treatment.

How Does Hospice Work?

Once a referral to hospice has been made by a medical professional, members of the hospice staff will come and conduct an assessment of the patient's overall needs as well as establish a care team. Along with the primary caregiver (usually a member of the family), the hospice team and the

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patient will outline an appropriate care plan.

From the moment a patient enters into hospice care, he or she may access a wide range of services, including:

- Physician services;
- Regular home visits by registered and licensed practical nurses;
- Home health aides to assist in activities of daily living, such as dressing and bathing;
- Social work and counseling services;
- Medical equipment, such as hospital beds and oxygen equipment;
- Medical supplies, such as bandages and catheters;
- Pain management and symptom control;
- Volunteer support to assist exhausted caregivers and family members;
- Specialized services, such as physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy, and nutritional counseling.

Where Do I Go to Get Hospice Services?

You don't have to go anywhere — hospice comes to you! Whether you are in a nursing home, hospice facility, hospital, or in your own home, hospice professionals will provide services wherever you live and are most comfortable. This flexibility in service is part of the hospice mission to help patients live their lives as they wish during this difficult time.

How Do I Pay for Hospice?

Hospice care is usually paid by Medicare and, in 43 states, Medicaid. In addition, many other types of health plans, including health maintenance organizations (HMOs) and preferred provider organizations (PPOs), cover the costs related to hospice care. For patients who do not have insurance and do not qualify for Medicare/Medicaid, many hospice programs will offer their services free of charge.

How Do I Find a Hospice Program in My Community?

Your physician and other medical professionals may know of hospice programs in your community. Two other resources are the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization www.nhpco.org (703-837-1500) and the Hospice Foundation of America www.hospicefoundation.org (800-854-3402). Both organizations have databases of hospice programs located throughout the United States to make your search easier.

Are All Hospices Alike?

While all hospice programs provide the same core services and subscribe to the same philosophy and mission of helping the terminally ill, each hospice program has its own characteristics and strengths that set it apart from other programs. It is important to find out as much as you can about any hospice program you are considering.

A Hospice Program Checklist

When considering a hospice program, you may wish to ask the following questions:

What kinds of services will be provided? _____

How soon can services be started? _____

What kind of support will be available to the family and, especially, to the caregiver? _____

What will a hospice volunteer do for the patient? _____

What role will the general physician play when hospice is involved? _____

How will hospice keep the patient comfortable and out of pain? _____

Does the hospice program provide services 24 hours a day, seven days a week? _____

Does the hospice program offer inpatient services? Where? _____

Does this hospice group offer its services in nursing homes and long-term care facilities? _____

Is this hospice program Medicare certified and licensed by the state? _____

How will the hospice staff follow the patient's wishes? What happens if they don't? _____

Who Regulates Hospice Programs?

There are federal, state, and professional organizations that evaluate hospice programs. They conduct ongoing surveys and evaluations to ensure that hospice programs meet the standards developed by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. In addition, hospice programs are licensed by the state and must be certified by Medicare to provide services.

What Makes Hospice Unique?

Hospice is unique because it provides care to address all the needs of the dying patient, including physical, emotional, and spiritual concerns. In addition, it provides support to family members and friends both during the illness and beyond through bereavement counseling.

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