



How to Choose Hospice Care

Hospice is a model of quality compassionate care for people facing a life-limiting illness or injury. According to the Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (HPCO), hospice care utilizes a team-oriented approach that includes a combination of expert medical care, pain management, and emotional and spiritual support, all tailored to the patient's wishes and needs. Support is also provided to the patient's loved ones. The goal is to improve the quality of the patient's last days and weeks of life.

The hospice focus "relies on the belief that each of us has the right to die pain-free and with dignity," according to the HPCO, "and that our loved ones will receive the necessary support to allow us to do so."

The Hospice Team

A hospice team consists of specially trained physicians, nurses, aides, social workers, spiritual caregivers, counselors, therapists and volunteers. The patient and his or her family are the core of the team and at the center of all decision making. The team works with the patient and family to develop a personalized care plan to control pain, manage symptoms and provide comfort, dignity and quality of life.

Hospice brings this caring team to the patient's home, be that a house, apartment, nursing home, assisted living setting or residential hospice. Regardless of where care is delivered, hospice provides instruction, assistance and support for the family.

Family and friends are encouraged to participate with regular visits, bringing favorite food or music, if appropriate, and assist with feeding, bathing, reading favorite books or just being present. When care is delivered in a facility, attention is paid to making the environment and care planning as patient-friendly as possible, according to the Hospice Foundation of America's Consumers Guide. Hospice care defines family as relatives, a life partner, or any friends that the patient considers as support.

Paying for Hospice

Medicare provides a hospice benefit for a patient with a prognosis of six months or less if the disease runs its normal course. The benefit can be extended if the patient is re-certified as being terminally ill. There may be a co-pay in some cases for pharmacy and equipment. Check to see what is covered under your insurance plan. Coverage often includes:

- Direction from a physician
- Intermittent nursing services
- Home health aides and homemakers

How can I find a hospice?

- Ask your physician, care manager or discharge planner.
- Visit www.hospicefoundation.org or www.nhpco.org/custom/directory.
- Call Hospice Foundation of America, 1-800-854-3402.
- Call National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, 1-800-658-8898.

- Social workers
- Spiritual caregivers
- Volunteers
- Therapists: occupational, physical, speech
- Medications for pain and symptom management
- Medical supplies and equipment
- Short-term inpatient care for crisis management and respite care
- Continuous home care in times of crisis
- Bereavement services for the family up to a year following a patient's death

Questions to Ask When Searching for a Hospice Provider

- Does the hospice serve your area?
- Is it licensed? (Most states require hospice to be licensed.)
- Is it Medicare/Medicaid-certified?
- What will you and your caregiver support system be expected to do?
- Will your insurance plan work with hospice?
- Is there a sliding scale payment plan for services not covered by insurance?
- Does the hospice have a support program for caregivers?
- Where is the inpatient or respite care provided?
- What personal expenses should you and your family expect?
- Do their policies on resuscitation, hydration and medications match yours?
- What is the nurse to patient ratio?

Resources: Hospice Foundation of America; Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services; www.caringhospice.com; JSSA (Jewish Social Service Agency), www.jssa.org; hospice@hospiceweb.com.

