



# Health Focus

## Hospice Services

### Why choose Hospice Services?

When you have a serious, life-limiting illness, treatments designed to cure can reach a point where they are more of a burden than a benefit. If living comfortably during the last phases of your life is your goal, hospice care is a good choice. Hospice focuses on providing you and your family the highest level of comfort, compassionate care and quality of life.

The hospice team can provide the following types of care to help individuals during this part of their journey:

**Physical Care** - Symptoms such as pain, nausea, anxiety, breathing distress, and sleep problems are treated. Hospice professionals provide medications to ease these symptoms. The team will teach you and your family how to use them. Treatments that are no longer beneficial may be stopped. The team will discuss what treatment changes may be needed. Caregiver training will be given to family members when needed.

**Emotional, Spiritual and Social Support** - Both the patient and family members also are given emotional, spiritual and social support. This support helps with anxiety, grief, family conflict, non-medical services needed and spiritual issues. Loved ones are given bereavement support for up to 13 months after the patient dies. Grief counseling also is available. Most people are surprised to learn that hospice patients with the same diagnosis as non-hospice patients live an average of 28 days longer.

### What is Hospice?

Hospice is specialized care for those who are nearing the end of life. The goal of hospice is to provide relief from discomfort and worry to a person who is dying, and to their loved ones, so they can make the most of the time they have left.

Hospice is provided by a team consisting of doctors, nurse practitioners, nurses and social workers trained in hospice care. It also may include home health aides, a spiritual advisor, volunteers and others. The patient is an important part of the team. The patient and family can express their own wishes and goals.

Hospice care is usually provided at the patient's home. Family members will be given help providing day-to-day care. Hospice aides will make visits. They will help keep the patient clean, warm, dry and comfortable. A nurse, social worker and other professionals will visit. Home health aides can help with bathing, bathroom needs and other care. Volunteers may help with cooking and errands and can give family members a break from caregiving. A hospice nurse or doctor is on call 24 hours a day to answer questions and handle problems.

The team will help you arrange personal care including setting up any special medical equipment needed. This may include a hospital bed, commode, oxygen or other supplies. Prescription drugs related to the patient's diagnosis are paid for under the Hospice Medicare Benefit.

Sometimes a patient's needs at end of life are too medically complex to be met at home. In those cases, hospice care may be provided at a nursing home or at an in-patient hospice facility. The hospice physician will determine the best way to manage this care.

### What Do I Need To Do To Receive Hospice Care?

Anyone may request hospice care but a doctor must confirm that you or your loved one qualifies for hospice. A person with life-limiting illness can receive hospice services when a doctor believes he or she has about 6 months or less to live. Because it can be hard to predict the course of an illness at end of life, some patients may live longer than six months. When that is the case, the six month period can be extended if the patient still qualifies.

**Practical Matters** -The hospice team helps the patient and family understand the illness and how it progresses. They can help both the patient and family review options so the best decisions are made at the right time. The social worker can help find resources to answer legal and insurance questions. They and the chaplains will give information about how to make funeral and memorial arrangements.