



# HOSPICE:

## Frequently Asked Questions

**When should a decision about a hospice be made and who should make it?**

At any time during a life-limiting illness, it is appropriate to discuss all of a patient's care options, including hospice. By law, the decision belongs to the patient. Most hospices accept patients who have a life expectancy of six months or less and who are referred by their personal physician.

**Should I wait for a physician to raise the possibility of hospice or should I raise it first?**

The patient and family should feel free to discuss hospice care at any time with their physician, other health care professionals, clergy or friends.

**Is all hospice care the same?**

No. Medicare requires certified hospices provide a basic level of care driven by the needs of the patient. However, the quality of all services can vary significantly from one hospice to another. You may want to call or meet with the hospices and ask questions about their services.

**What specific assistance does hospice provide home based patients?**

Hospice patients are cared for by a team consisting of a physician, a nurse, social workers, hospice aides, clergy, therapists, and volunteers. Each provides assistance based on his or her own area of expertise. In addition, hospices provide medications, supplies, equipment and anything else required.

**How does hospice manage pain?**

Hospice believes that emotional and spiritual pain are just as real and in need of attention as physical pain, so it can address each. Hospice nurses and doctors are up to date on the latest medications and devices for pain and symptom relief and provide emotional and spiritual assistance to the patient and the family.

**Will medications prevent the patient from being able to talk and be aware?**

Usually not. It is the goal of hospice to have the patient as pain free and alert as possible. By constantly consulting with the patient, hospices have been very successful in reaching this goal.

**Does hospice provide any help to the family after the patient dies?**

Most hospices provide continuing contact and support for caregivers for at least a year following the death of a loved one. Many hospices also sponsor bereavement groups and support for anyone in the community who has experienced a death of a family member, friend, or similar losses.

**What does the hospice admission process involve?**

Initially, the hospice program will contact the patient's physician to make sure he or she agrees that hospice care is appropriate for their patient. A nurse will visit the patient for a physical assessment to determine the appropriate needs and address any concerns. The patient will also be asked to sign consent and insurance forms, similar to the forms signed when entering a hospital.

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