Hospice Care

Hospice is a care service which can be used by people who are terminally ill and in whom healing is no longer thought possible. Hospice care is for people believed to have no more than 6 months to live. It is meant to help with the two largest fears near the end of life (the fears of dying and of being alone), as well as pain management, and an attempt to allow people to pass away comfortably at home.

Hospice staff:

- Administers appropriate pain relief.
- Provides nursing care.
- Offers reassurance and support to loved ones and family members.
- Provides services to keep people comfortable at home or in a hospice facility.

Together, you can see to it that your loved one is not alone during this last and important phase of life.

You, your family, and your caregivers help you decide when hospice services should begin. If your condition improves or the disease goes into remission, you can be discharged from the hospice program. You can return to hospice care at a later time if needed.

The hospice philosophy recognizes death as the final stage of life. It helps patients continue an alert, pain-free life, and manage symptoms while surrounded by their loved ones. Hospice affirms life without hurrying death. Hospice care treats the person rather than the disease. It emphasizes quality of life with family-centered care. Hospice care involves the patient and family and helps them make decisions. Care is provided 24 hours a day and 7 days a week.

The care is designed to:

- Relieve or decrease pain.
- Control other problems.
- Provide as much quality time as possible.
- Allow people to die with dignity.

Unlike other medical care, the focus is no longer on curing disease. The goal of hospice care is to offer as high a quality of life as possible during the end of life. In this way, the last days of life may be spent with dignity.

With hospice care, instead of spending the last weeks or months in a hospital, a person is with loved ones in the home or a homelike setting. About 90 percent of hospice care is provided at home. But hospice is available wherever a person lives, including a nursing home or assisted-living residence. Some residential hospices designed specifically for hospice care also exist. Hospice care is available for many types of terminal illnesses.

Hospice services are meant to serve both the patient and family members.

- **Comfort**. In most cases, the individual stays in his or her home or in homelike surroundings instead of in a hospital. The core of hospice is a cooperative effort by family, friends and a team of professional and volunteer caregivers working together to meet your loved one's needs. This team supplies all necessary medications and equipment. It works with both the person involved and family members to relieve pain and symptoms.
- **Support**. Individuals enjoy the support of loved ones by receiving much of the basic care from family and friends. A nurse may lead the team and coordinates the day-to-day care. A doctor is also part of the team. Chaplains and social workers are available to counsel the family and their loved one. They make sure emotional, spiritual and social needs are being met. Trained volunteers perform a wide variety of tasks as needed, such as:

- Providing companionship.
- Doing light housekeeping.
- Preparing meals.
- Running errands.
- Providing respite for the family.

- **Improving quality of life**. Caring for someone who is dying is emotionally and physically demanding. This can be particularly true for family members who are primary caregivers. But you can take comfort in knowing that hospice is an act of love that can improve the quality of life for all involved. Professionals are often available to tend to the needs of grieving family members as well.
- **Spiritual Care**. Hospice care emphasizes the spiritual needs of you and your family. People differ in their spiritual needs and religious beliefs so spiritual care is individualized to meet the persons' and family's needs. It may include helping you to look at what death means to you, to say good-bye, or to perform a specific religious ceremony or ritual.

HOW TO SELECT A PROGRAM

Most hospice programs are run by nonprofit, independent organizations. Some are affiliated with hospitals, nursing homes or home health care agencies. Some are for-profit organizations.
You can learn about existing hospice programs in your area from your health caregivers.

ASK THE FOLLOWING:

- What services are available to the patient?
- What services are offered to the family?
- Are bereavement services available?
- How involved are the family members?
- How involved is the doctor?
- Who makes up the hospice care team? How are they trained or screened?
- How will the individual's pain and symptoms be managed?
- If circumstances change, can services be provided in different settings, such as the home or the hospital?
- Is the program reviewed and licensed by the state or certified in some other way?
- Are all costs covered by insurance?
- How much you pay for hospice care can vary greatly. It depends on the length and type of care necessary and your insurance coverage. Medicare and most private insurance plans, including managed care organizations, cover hospice care. Hospice is also covered by Medicaid in most states. Some hospice programs provide services on a sliding fee scale, based on your ability to pay. They may also provide some durable medical equipment for support within the home.

FURTHER INFORMATION AVAILABLE AT:

- http://www.cancer.gov
- Or 1-800-422-6237

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