



Hospice Care

Comfort and Compassion When It's Needed Most

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One of our greatest fears is dying alone...in pain and away from our family, friends and loved ones. Studies show that 75% of all Americans would rather die at home with the proper support, as opposed to spending this time in a sterile hospital with all of its restrictions. There is an end-of-life care option that does provide dying people and their families with comfort, compassion and dignity. It is called **hospice**.

There are many misconceptions about hospice care. One way to clear these misconceptions is to talk to a loved one of someone who experienced hospice. Ninety-eight percent of Michiganders who have used hospice, report being very satisfied with the care and support provided. If so many people liked hospice, then...what is it, and why do people feel so strongly about it?

What is Hospice?

Hospice is considered the best way to care for dying people and their families. The goal is to provide compassion, expert pain control and control of other uncomfortable symptoms that may result from the illness. In addition, emotional support and spiritual care, are all developed to meet the patient's and family's needs and desires. **The patient is the boss.** The focus of hospice care is on caring, and not on cure. Patients can receive hospice care where they live, whether in a home, nursing home, hospital, or other long-term care facilities, even assisted living. Hospice care is available to all people of all ages with any type of terminal illness, including but not limited to cancer.

How does Hospice Care Work?

Usually the patient's family is the primary caregiver and helps the terminally ill person make decisions. Members of the hospice staff visit the home and talk to the patient and family about what they want and what will help the patient be more comfortable. Visits to the home are made as is needed to meet the needs of the patient and family.

The hospice team is made up of nurses, home health aides, your family doctor, counselor's social workers, trained volunteers and other therapists, as needed. The plan of care is developed with the patient and family. It identifies the services being offered, and the medical equipment, tests, procedures, medications and treatments needed.

The hospice team is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. This means that you can call a nurse any time you need one. If needed, the nurse will come to the home to assist the patient and family. This 24 hour emergency, on-call service provides a great deal of comfort to patients and families knowing they will not have to wait hours before help is available. If a patient's symptoms can not be controlled at home, hospice will provide an admission to the hospital for a short time until control is restored. Then the patient can go back home.

Hospice services continue for 13 months after the death of the loved one. This is called bereavement care and is provided by all hospice programs. Services range according to the family needs. Often support groups, companionship and individual counseling are offered so the family can learn to move on and live the remainder of their lives without their loved one.

How about Nutrition in Hospice?

A common misconception about hospice is that patients are not allowed to eat. This is not true. Very sick patients often have no appetite, just like you and I when we have the flu. Hospice works with the patient to help develop menus that patients will eat and also helps the family to understand why dying people do not usually want to eat. The patient is the only one that can tell us if they want to eat or not. Hospice respects the patient and family's wishes.

How do I Know When it is Time for Hospice?

It's time for hospice when the patient's illness is no longer able to be cured and the focus of care turns to comfort. People who are still active and enjoying life can also be on hospice. You don't have to wait until the last days of life to enjoy the benefits of hospice care. The sooner you are on hospice, the sooner control of pain and symptoms can be improved and family members can receive support. Quality of life is critical at this point in someone's life. Pain and symptom control and support are necessary for a good quality of life. This is what hospice is all about. If you are thinking that hospice might be the right type of care, ask your doctor, or call a hospice program and they will help you discuss this important decision.

How do I Get into Hospice?

Anyone can contact a hospice program and ask questions. You can refer yourself or your loved one to a hospice program. The hospice will contact your physician to make sure the illness is at the point of needing hospice.

There are 93 individual hospice programs in Michigan. It is a good idea to call several that service the area in which you live and talk to them about their services and ask questions. All programs welcome calls and will help you to solve problems and listen to your needs, without committing to service.

How is Hospice Paid For?

Almost all insurers pay for hospice. Medicare, Medicaid, Blue Cross and Blue Shield, as well as most private insurances, cover hospice. Any hospice program will help you investigate your insurance coverage. Most hospice programs will even take patients that do not have insurance.

How Much will Hospice Cost Me?

There is no out-of-pocket cost for hospice. The only exception is if your insurance company requires a co-pay; Medicare and Medicaid do not. Hospice receives payment from your insurer: in turn, hospice will pay for all of your medications that are related to the terminal illness, all medical supplies (dressings, etc.) All medical equipment (such as beds and wheel chairs) needed in the home, and any hospital admission, if needed. As you can see, from a financial point of view, hospice is a great benefit.

What does the Hospice Volunteer Do?

Most often, volunteers provide much needed support to the patient and family. They often help by running errands, preparing light meals, staying with a patient to give family members a break, lending emotional support, companionship for the patient and helping with light housekeeping.

Volunteers are specially trained in patient care, maintaining confidentiality, listening skills, and symptoms of approaching death, working with families, loss, grief and bereavement support.

In summary, you can see that hospice is a very complete program of care based on compassion

and maintaining quality of life for patients and families. **Now** is the time to ask questions; don't wait until you need the service to learn about it. There are two events certain to occur in life...birth and death. We need to know all of our options so that at the end of life we can be as prepared as possible and have our wishes known.

For information about hospice, a free information booklet, or a list of hospices that service your community please contact us at **(800) 536-6300**.

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