

What is Hospice?

Definition: Hospice is a specialized program that provides comfort-oriented care for individuals with life-limiting conditions. It focuses on managing symptoms and improving quality of life rather than pursuing aggressive treatments like chemotherapy or dialysis.

Goal: The main goal of hospice care is to treat symptoms to keep the patient comfortable while maintaining dignity and quality of life during their final stages.

How to Get Hospice Care

- **Requesting Hospice:** You may request hospice services directly or your physician may suggest a referral.
- **Referral Process:** If you're at home, your physician can refer you. If you're in the hospital, a case manager or social worker will assist with the referral.

Services Provided by Hospice

- **Registered Nurse:** Manages care needs, provides symptom control, and offers 24/7 phone support.
- **Home Health Aide:** Helps with personal care tasks like bathing, grooming, and light housekeeping.
- **Social Worker:** Offers counseling, emotional support, and assists with insurance issues.
- **Therapists:** Provides physical, occupational, or speech therapy, and may include art or music therapy. Therapy also may include sessions to help maintain patient's current functional level.
- **Medical Director:** Coordinates care with your physician and can become your primary physician.
- **Volunteers:** Provide companionship, run errands, and assist with light chores.
- **Spiritual Care Coordinator:** Offers pastoral support and spiritual guidance.
- **Bereavement Coordinator:** Provides grief counseling and support to family members after the patient's death.
- **Respite Care:** Care provided for example in a skilled nursing facility for up to five days intended to give caregivers a rest.

Insurance and Coverage

- **Medicare:** Medicare fully covers hospice care, including nursing care, physician fees, counseling, medical supplies, medications for symptom control, and home health aide services.
- **Other Insurance:** Most insurance plans have a hospice benefit. Check with your provider for details.
- **Inpatient Care:** Hospice can be provided in extended care facilities or nursing homes, though room and board are usually not covered by insurance.

Caregiver Support

- **Family Caregivers:** Hospice does not provide 24-hour in-home care, so family, friends, or hired caregivers will need to help with daily activities.
- **Collaboration:** Hospice works closely with family members and caregivers to ensure proper support.

Equipment and Supplies

- **Assessing Needs:** A nurse or case manager helps identify the medical supplies and equipment you need. These are arranged before discharge if you're in the hospital or upon referral if at home.

Discharge and Reentry

- **Discharge:** If a patient's condition improves or stabilizes, they can be discharged from hospice care and return to traditional medical treatment.
- **Reentry:** If needed again, hospice services can be reinstated, though insurance may limit the number of times this happens.

Hospice and the Dying Process

- **Natural Dying:** Hospice does not aim to speed up or slow down the dying process. Instead, it focuses on managing symptoms to ensure comfort and dignity during the final stages of life.
- **Pain Management:** Pain and symptoms are managed through medication, including pills, liquids, patches, or injections. The goal is to control pain while keeping the patient comfortable at home.

Eligibility for Hospice Care

- **Criteria:** Hospice is appropriate for individuals with a life-limiting illness and a prognosis of six months or less to live.
- **Chronic Conditions:** Hospice may be suitable for those with chronic, progressively worsening conditions, even if death is not imminent.
- **Indicators:** Consider hospice care if you experience:
 - Regular bothersome symptoms (chronic pain, shortness of breath)
 - Declining quality of life or increased fatigue
 - Frequent hospital visits or need for more care
 - Preference for comfort care and staying at home

Hospice Philosophy

- **Living Well:** Hospice focuses on living well, not just the end of life. It emphasizes comfort, dignity, and quality of life in the final months or days.
- **Personal Choices:** Hospice care allows patients to make decisions about their care, often at home, free from unnecessary medical interventions. It provides support for emotional, spiritual, and physical needs during the final stage of life.

For More Information:

If you think hospice care might be right for you or your loved one, talk to your physician, nurse, or healthcare professional. They can arrange a Hospice Information visit and help guide you through the process.