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# HOW TO HELP YOUR LOVED ONE FIND PEACE WITH HOME HOSPICE CARE

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Hospice care is a compassionate service for persons with a life-limiting illness and their families. Dealing with the end stages of a terminal illness is a stressful time in the life of a person.

A high-quality provider will give compassionate care that allows your loved one and their caregivers the ability to maximize the final months of your loved one's life with palliative care and support services that enhance life.

As a caregiver, it may feel impossible to let someone else take over, even for a few hours. Hospice professionals understand this concern.

To ease the fear of leaving a loved one in the care of a stranger, look for certain qualities in a home hospice care provider and the staff they employ. This is a life-changing decision so take time to ask questions and research.

The hospice staff will be there to support and help during a this time in your loved one's life and your family's life. You need to make sure they are up to the challenge.

# THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

Understanding the stages, a patient, and their loved ones go through when dealing with a terminal illness will help you determine which hospice care provider can meet your loved one's needs. The five stages are:

**Denial:** You refuse to believe that your loved one's illness is life-limiting and terminal. The world loses its meaning, and you become numb. This state of shock and denial helps you survive the raw stages of grief.

**Anger:** Rage takes over after it sinks in that the end of your loved one's life is near and the disease cannot be cured. Strength to fight and continue comes with the anger.

**Bargaining:** You reexamine your loved one's life to see why this has happened. It involves begging a god or higher power to cure your loved one in exchange for a life of service to others. You look to find a reason or "what if" explanation for their suffering.

**Depression:** The energy generated with anger and bargaining gives way to a fuller understanding of the present situation. Your loved one may withdraw from life and those who care for them the most, feeling that they are unable to go on. Life seems hopeless.

**Acceptance:** This is not about thinking it is okay that your loved one is dying or that it is okay that they will soon pass, it is about them being at peace with the situation so that they can focus on enjoying their final days or months. They have the clarity to prepare for the inevitable.

# HOSPICE'S MANY FACES

**Palliative care:** This is focused on relieving your loved one's symptoms so they can maximize the remaining time with family. To be considered eligible for hospice care, the diagnosis includes a determination that you are both terminal and within six months of death. The team will monitor pain levels, nutrition intake and mood to ease suffering.

**Grief counseling:** Helps your loved one work through the five stages of grief and other emotional issues. Terminally ill patients follow the same stages as their family members. Therapy can help your loved one reconnect with estranged friends or family so amends can happen.

**Home care:** Most hospice services are provided at home so your loved one can be as comfortable as possible. Part of accepting hospice is deciding to stop life-saving treatments like chemotherapy. However, you are free to leave hospice and return to life-saving treatments at any time.

**Medical equipment:** Hospice can arrange for the provision of medical equipment as well as medications that are included in the treatment plan.

**Personal care services:** The provider can arrange for cleaning services or other services to help your loved one.

**24/7 nursing services:** To stay home and receiving palliative care, nurses may need to visit the home to provide care. It is better to have this available from the same entity providing hospice care.

**Social service support:** Social workers and other similar professionals are available to help your loved one navigate Medicare, Medicaid, Social Security Disability, financial planning and other administrative tasks involved in hospice care.

**Volunteer services:** Many hospice home care services have relationships with meals on wheels type organizations or have volunteers who can visit. A fresh meal and simple social visit can lift spirits.

# TYPES OF SERVICES PROVIDED TO FAMILY

**Bereavement counseling:** This gives family members and caregivers access to therapy to help them work through the traumatic situation of watching a loved one deteriorate and pass on.

**Respite Care:** An in home nurse or aide will come in and care for the patient so a caregiver can take a break. Caregivers forgot to take care of themselves, and respite care is there to allow them time for self-care.

## STAFF TRAITS

**Open, honest communication:** Hospice care helps your loved one, caregivers and other important people in your life with a difficult time. It is emotionally demanding work, and staff can get burned out quickly. That said, it is essential that staff be able to maintain open, honest and professional communication with you and your loved one. Judgment about how you want your loved one to spend their final months needs to be withheld. It is the staff person's job to remain compassionate, supportive and professional at all times.

**Qualifications:** Are staffers licensed? How much past home hospice care does a professional working with your loved one possess? A great personality still needs the proper training and experience.

**Well Organized:** A hospice support aid is a calm spot in the storm surrounding the sadness. Emotions for your loved and your family will be high, and you need someone who can keep organized and help center you all.

**Able to adapt:** A hospice care team needs to have enough flexibility to adjust to the current reality. Your loved one will have better days than others and the hospice staff need to be able to adapt.

**Firm:** Hospice staff needs to handle many negative behaviors from angry, scared and desperate patients and family members. They need to remain calm and direct so that medical orders are completed. Finding a way to ensure your loved one stays clean can be a challenge if they are despondent and have decided bathing is not worth it.

**Team player:** Hospice staff needs to work with your loved one, your family, and other medical professionals to coordinate and provide care. The person needs to be able to put your best interests before their ego when working with others to determine the best course of action.

**Serenity:** Helping a dying person accept and live the remaining days as full as possible takes a sense of serenity. Call it spirituality or inner peace; these are the people that will be there for you until the end. They will counsel your loved one and help them and their family find serenity.

# RESOURCES TO LOOK FOR

**Look for a home hospice care provider that is well connected with hospitals, mental health providers, and other related services.**

Your loved one may need to be hospitalized for short periods of time when symptoms are unmanageable at home, so a provider needs to be able to work at home, in a hospital or at an assisted living facility.

**Look at the company and ask around to see what others in the community think about them.**

Network with hospital staff and other members of support group to solicit recommendations. What additional certifications or accreditations does the home hospice care provider have?

**Look for a provider that is Medicare certified.**

The advantage of this certification is that it requires the company to employ medical personnel experienced with symptom control.

**Check with your loved one's insurance carrier to see what entities are covered or considered "in network."**

Hospice service coverage varies from policy to policy.

**Check with your loved one's doctor to see if he or she has recommendations.**

The medical specialists who handle life-limiting illnesses are a great resource for information.

# ADVANTAGES OF HOSPICE CARE

Allowing hospice to come into your loved one's life will help them live out the rest of your days fully, with support for them and your family. Rather than getting stuck in desperation with no hope, hospice professionals work with your loved one and provide counseling so they can come to an acceptance of their situation.

A well run company can take many administrative and medical burdens off the backs of your loved one and your family. A full range of support services and palliative care options from one entity makes coordination of care simpler.

Choosing a home hospice care provider is a complex, critical decision.

**Talk it over with your loved one's caregiver and family members before choosing a provider.** The primary goal of hospice care is to help your loved one live their life as full a life as possible despite a life-limiting, terminal illness. Life Limiting Illnesses include many more conditions than cancers. These conditions include but are not limited to cancer, heart disease, Alzheimer's, end-stage liver disease, stroke, and end-stage renal disease. Unfortunately, these illnesses can affect people of all ages. As a result, hospice care is available for all ages. About 20% of hospice patients are under 65 years old.

**The range of service offered and the quality of the staff are areas that require a lot of attention and research.** Finding the right hospice company will add ease during the end stages of a life-limiting illness.

There are resources on the Internet, such as the [National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization](#), that provide detailed information and suggested questions. This organization has a set of recommended standards for hospice care that are worth reading. This could be the most important decisions of your loved one's life so do not rush into selecting the first hospice you hear about.

**Look for a company that will provide family-centered, compassionate care.** The depth of knowledge of the staff and willingness to work with your loved one are also important factors. Choosing hospice, if appropriate, can help your loved one live out their final days in peace and at home.