



Facts About Hospice Care

Many misconceptions surround the idea of hospice care. Typically, people believe that hospice is a support group for people who have given up hope and are waiting for the end of life. However, hospice does much more than that. Hospice provides compassionate care for people who are facing a life-limiting illness. Patients can receive expert medical care, pain management, and emotional as well as spiritual support tailored to their individual needs and wishes. Support is available for the patient's loved ones as well.

How long should hospice provide care?

According to the 2010 Hospice Care in America study completed by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, one-third of consumers (36%) and nearly one-third of physicians (31%) described the role of hospice as support for those waiting to die. However, in a 2007 study, **the mean survival was 29 days longer for hospice patients than for non-hospice patients.** In 2009 the average number of days patients received hospice care was 69. However, the 2010 study also shows that half of all patients received care for less than three weeks. Physicians and consumers agree that patients should be receiving hospice care for at least 90 days, although the majority of the general public (54%) and physicians (52%) identify 6 months or longer as the appropriate length of time for hospice service. According to these findings, hospice is a much underutilized resource that can have a great impact on quality of life, and even longevity, for people facing life-limiting illness.

How can caregivers pay for hospice?

With the vast majority of hospice patients over the age of 65, a great concern is how to pay for hospice. Hospice can be covered by private insurance, Medicaid, or other means. However, Medicare pays for most hospice care. With payments covering 100% of the cost of many hospice services, Medicare takes the financial strain off most patients, their family and caregivers. Most consumers (68%) and a significant number of physicians (36%) were unaware of the Medicare hospice benefit.

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Hospice can provide quality of life and dignity for both patient and family during life-limiting illness. Hospice staff typically has the flexibility to provide their services where patients and family are most comfortable—at home, or in hospice centers, hospitals, nursing homes, or long-term care facilities.

For more details about hospice, what it includes and how to find providers, log on to The Hospice Foundation of America's website at <http://www.hospicefoundation.org>.

The complete **2010 Hospice Care in America** study is available at http://www.nhpco.org/files/public/Statistics_Research/Hospics_Facts_Figures_Oct-2010.pdf.