

HOSPICE

What is hospice?

Hospice care is provided to terminally ill patients and their families with the goal of enhancing quality of life and addressing all physical, psychological and spiritual needs of the patient. It is not a place; it is a philosophy of care. Hospice care is provided by an interdisciplinary team of health care professionals who are experts in end-of-life symptom management.

Who is on the hospice team?

The hospice team will have a physician, nurses, social workers, chaplains, bereavement workers, aides, and therapists, all of whom have been trained to work with people with terminal illnesses.

Where is hospice care provided?

Most people receive hospice care in their homes, but it may also be provided in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, hospice residences and hospitals.

Who is eligible for hospice?

Hospice care is available for individuals whose physician has determined they are in the terminal stage of their disease, understood as a probable life expectancy of approximately six months or less. The patient must no longer wish to receive medical treatments aimed at prolonging life.

Is hospice covered by insurance?

Home hospice care is fully covered under the Medicare Hospice Benefit. It is also generally covered by Medicaid and most private insurance. If a patient is in a hospice residence rather than at home, however, Medicare usually will not cover room and board.

What specific services does hospice provide?

The many services that hospice provides include at no charge to the patient:

- Patient support and comfort including pain and other symptom control
- Medical and social assessment
- Nursing visits
- Individual, family and group psychosocial and spiritual counseling
- The provision of necessary medications, equipment, and supplies

- Support for caregivers
- Dietary and nutritional advice
- Homemaking and home health aide assistance
- Grief and bereavement support for family members for at least a year following the death of the patient.

How can I receive hospice care?

If a patient chooses to elect hospice care under the Medicare Hospice Benefit, then a physician and the hospice medical director must certify the patient is eligible as explained above. If a patient is enrolling under some other form of payment or benefit, physician referral and certification requirements may be different. Patients have to consent to hospice enrollment; if they lack capacity to do so, health care agents or surrogates can make the decision.

Can my own doctor continue to treat me?

Yes, if that is what you want. The interdisciplinary team will work with your doctor and develop an individualized plan of care.

Am I giving up hope if I am in hospice?

No, not at all, you are not giving up hope if you enroll in hospice. The time when hospice care is appropriate is usually the time when hope turns from curative goals to goals of maintaining or improving quality of life, time with family and loved ones, comfort care and finding dignity in each day. Sometimes a hospice patient's condition improves to the point at which they are no longer considered terminally ill, in which case hospice care is no longer appropriate.

Do I have to stay in hospice once I am enrolled?

No. Most patients and family members are very satisfied with hospice. However, you can leave hospice or switch to another hospice provider at any time. You may also sign yourself out of a hospice program and return to various other forms of medical care if you believe that it would be beneficial for you. It is always your choice. If your disease stabilizes and you are no longer expected to have a limited prognosis, you can be discharged from hospice care and have the option to elect it again later when needed if your health condition changes.