

HOSPICE

Hospice is a special concept of care designed to provide comfort and support to patients and their families when a life-limiting illness no longer responds to cure-oriented treatments. The word "hospice" stems from the Latin word "hospitum" meaning guesthouse. It was originally used to describe a place of shelter for weary and sick travelers (HFA, 2001).

Hospice care neither prolongs life nor hastens death. It offers a specialized knowledge of medical care, including pain management. The goal of hospice care is to improve the quality of a patient's last days by offering comfort and dignity. Hospice care is provided by a team-oriented group of specially trained professionals, volunteers and family members. Hospice addresses all symptoms of a disease, with a special emphasis on controlling a patient's pain and discomfort. It deals with the emotional, social and spiritual impact of the disease on the patient and the patient's family

and friends. Hospice offers a variety of bereavement and counseling services to families before and after a patient's death (HFA, 2001).

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization estimates that there are 3,139 operational or planned hospice programs in the United States today, including the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and Guam. In 1999, 44% of hospices were independent, freestanding agencies, 33% were hospital-based, 17% were home health agency-based, and 4% were based in nursing homes or under other auspices. In 1999, nearly 2.4 million Americans died. It is estimated that hospices admitted 700,000 patients in 1999 and that 600,000 Americans died while receiving hospice care. The median length of stay was 29 days.

The following provides a profile of hospice patients in 1995 provided by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization:

	Male	Female	White	African American	Hispanic	Other
Hospice Patients	52%	48%	83%	8%	3%	6%
65 years and older	71%	74%				
50 - 64 years of age	17%	16.7%				
18-49 years of age	10%	8%				
17 years and younger	1%	1%				

Hospice care became a covered benefit under the Medicare program in 1983. In 1997, Medicare spent approximately \$2 billion of its roughly \$200 billion budget on hospice service provided to 382,989 patients who received over 19 million days of hospice care. Coverage for hospice care is provided to more than 80% of employees in medium and large businesses while 82% of managed care plans offer hospice benefits. (NHPCO, 2000)

Hospices now care for over half of all Americans who die from cancer, and a growing number of patients with other chronic, life-threatening illnesses, such as end-stage heart or

lung disease. America's hospices were leaders in caring for terminally ill patients with HIV/AIDS. (HFA, 2000)

There is no mandatory nationwide accreditation or "seal of approval" for hospice care. Many hospice programs are certified voluntarily by Medicare and accredited by the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations or Community Health Accreditation Program. As of 1999, 44 states have hospice licensure laws defining requirements for operating as a hospice program. (NHPCO, 2000)