

Frequently Asked Questions

What is Hospice?

Hospice is a philosophy of caring for those living with a life-limiting illness.

The hospice philosophy holds that end-of-life care should emphasize quality of life. The object is to treat the whole person, and not just the disease. The hospice philosophy focuses on patient/family-centered care that addresses the physical, spiritual, emotional, and practical needs of the patient. An interdisciplinary team of health care professionals works with the patient and family to design and implement a plan of care unique to the patient's diagnosis. In addition, hospice provides all medications, services, and equipment related to the terminal illness. Hospice care does not end with the patient's death; it continues with up to 13 months of bereavement counseling for the family and loved ones.

Can you tell me about the history of Hospice?

The term hospice comes from the same root as the word hospitality. Its origins began when medieval monks would care for ill persons travelling across Europe. Physician Dame Cicely Saunders founded the first modern hospice in London in 1967. She introduced the concept of palliation to an audience of physicians at Yale during a lecture in the 1970's. What was particularly compelling were the photographs of cancer patients showing marked differences before and after their pain was controlled by a hospice team.

Where are the patients cared for?

Hospice cares for people where they live. Although some hospice care is provided in hospitals, in-patient hospice facilities or nursing homes, the vast majority of patients are cared for in the place they call home.

Does Medicare pay for Hospice?

Hospice is a Medicare benefit.

Congress's Medicare Hospice Benefit of 1983 was established to ensure that all Medicare beneficiaries could access high-quality end-of-life care. Hospice became an optional Medicaid benefit as a part of the consolidated omnibus Budget Reconciliation Act of 1985 (COBRA '85). Americans are now promised the opportunity to live the end of their lives free of pain and with emotional and spiritual support. More than 80% of hospice patients are Medicare beneficiaries.

Is Hospice only for cancer patients?

Hospice care is not limited to cancer patients.

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, kidney and renal failure and ALS.