



Helping you choose: Quality hospice care

When you need hospice care, you should find out some information to help you choose the best hospice care for you or your loved one. Your doctor, a social worker, or hospital discharge planner can provide names of some local hospice programs. Talk with representatives from each one.

Hospice is end-of-life care for patients and their families. Hospice focuses on controlling pain and symptoms. Hospice care begins in the final six months of life and is usually provided in the patient's home, but it can also be provided in a hospital or nursing home. Hospice care is a Medicare benefit. The following questions can help you get the information you need.

Questions about care and services

- Does the hospice offer all the services that the patient needs?
- What is the hospice's philosophy of care?
- How long has the hospice been in business?
- How often will a nurse or social worker come to see the patient?
- What other staff members are involved in care?
- Will the patient's regular doctor be involved in the patient's care?
- If the patient lives in a nursing home, how do hospice staff and the nursing home staff work together? Who provides personal care? Who gives medication?
- What services are available for family members? Ask about counseling and spiritual support.
- Will the hospice teach family caregivers to help care for the patient?
- Is "respite care" provided for family caregivers? Respite care is time off from care giving.
- Are volunteers available to visit the patient and provide companionship?
- If you are paying for your services, does the hospice have a list of fees and services?
- Are you eligible for payment from Medicare, Medicaid or other insurance?
- Will the hospice pay for all of the patient's medicines and equipment? Are there co-pays or other costs?
- Where can you get help finding financial assistance if you need it?
- Is the hospice "accredited?" Accredited means that the service follows rules for patient safety and quality. Go to Quality Check[®] at www.qualitycheck.org to find Joint Commission accredited hospice services.
- What happens if there is a power failure or natural disaster? What is the plan to make sure that the patient is safe and cared for?
- Is there a 24-hour telephone number you can call if you have questions or complaints?
- How are medical emergencies handled after hours? For example, severe pain or breathing problems.
- What are your rights and responsibilities? Can you get a paper copy? Can they be explained to you?
- Is patient information kept confidential? Is there any reason patient information is released?

Questions about end-of-life concerns

- Ask about the rules about
 - pain and anti-nausea medicine
 - antibiotics
 - chemotherapy (to relieve symptoms)
 - radiation therapy
 - blood transfusions
 - oxygen
 - taking out feeding tubes
 - emergency hospital visits
- Is the hospice sensitive to the patient's cultural and religious needs?
- How will the hospice honor the patient's "advance directive?" This document includes the patient's decisions about end-of-life care.

- What happens at the time of death? Who is there? What can you expect?
- Does the hospice provide someone to help with funeral planning?

Questions about health care workers

- Is there a nurse who will oversee the care of the patient or be the main contact person? Will the nurse come to every visit? Who is the back-up person?
- How is the staff chosen? What happens if the patient would like another staff member to oversee their care?
- Does a supervisor visit the patient to observe the care being given?
- Is there a pharmacist available to answer questions about medicines?

Questions about medical equipment in the home

- Will you need medical equipment? This equipment can be bought or leased. Some examples of medical equipment are:
 - hospital beds
 - oxygen
 - suction machines
- Will the patient or family be taught how to use the medical equipment?
- Will the medical equipment be checked?
- Will the equipment be replaced or fixed if there is a problem?

Resources

[National Hospice Foundation](#): Information for family caregivers

www.nextstepincare.org: Information for family caregivers and health care professionals. See the “[Family Caregiver’s Guide to Hospice and Palliative Care](#).”

The Helping You Choose series is published by The Joint Commission, the largest health care accrediting body in the United States that promotes quality and safety.