

What is hospice?

Hospice is a complete service that focuses on controlling symptoms such as shortness of breath, anxiety, pain and improving the quality of life for people with a terminal illness. People choose hospice in order to focus on quality of life, symptom control, comfort, and family and caregiver support. This care is a substitute for aggressive treatments and life-extending treatments.

What are the benefits and services of hospice?

Hospice is a team approach that uses the skills of different medical specialists such as doctors, nurses, and social workers, and non-medical specialists such as volunteers and specialists in spiritual care. This team works together to create an environment of comfort and emotional and spiritual support for both the patient and the family.

One of the benefits of hospice is that you have a 24-hour number to call if an unexpected problem occurs. A hospice nurse can offer advice and make a home visit if necessary which can reduce unnecessary and stressful visits to the emergency department (ED).

Other services hospice can provide are:

- Medications to relieve nausea, pain, shortness of breath, anxiety, and other symptoms
- Medical supplies such as a hospital bed or a wheelchair
- Support for the family, including grief counseling and teaching how to do certain healthcare tasks
- A short hospital stay if the person's symptoms cannot be managed at home
- Short-term respite care — time off for the family

- Volunteers to provide companionship
- Grief counseling for the family

Hospice offers an opportunity for care that sees the whole person and the family as the unit of care and works with them to achieve the best quality of life possible. Most hospice services are provided at home, but they can also be provided in nursing homes and assisted-living facilities. There are also inpatient hospices in some hospitals and freestanding hospices.

What is palliative care?

Palliative care is a service that improves how individuals function in everyday life, even as they are undergoing treatment for a serious illness. It is specialized medical care that focuses on symptom relief from serious illness. It does not replace primary medical treatment but it works alongside other medical care to prevent and relieve stressful symptoms in order to improve quality of life. It can be started at any point in an illness.

Palliative care offers a nurse practitioner (NP) that oversees care in the home. The NP comes to the home once every 4-5 weeks and works with the palliative care doctor to manage symptoms. Most palliative care programs do not offer social work, aide, spiritual care, or volunteer services.

How are hospice and palliative care paid for?

- Hospice is a covered benefit under most private insurance companies, Medicare, and is included in Medicare Advantage plans. All other Medicare benefits under Parts A and B continue including the attending doctor's fees. This means you can continue to get services for conditions that are not related to the terminal illness. Most hospices allow visits to primary care doctor and ALS Clinic. Typically, hospices will not cover specialty care such as Pulmonary (lung) care or Speech Language Pathology.

- Palliative care is covered by most health plans, including Medicare and Medicaid, as a regular medical service.

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