

About Hospice Care

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

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.

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.

Hospice care is reimbursed on a per diem basis.

The Medicare reimbursement for hospice care is a set rate per day. There are four hospice rates each linked to one of the four levels of hospice care: routine home care, general inpatient care, respite care, and continuous care. The routine home care rate, at which more than 96 percent of all Medicare hospice patients are billed, is approximately \$126 per day.

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. America's hospices are leaders in caring for patients with HIV/AIDS.

Hospice Care is Increasing

Hospice admitted 1,060,000 patients in 2004. This represents an increase of 110,000 patients in just one year's time. An estimated 31.5% of Americans who died in 2004 received hospice care (vs. 25% in 2001).