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# HOSPICE INFORMATION CENTER

for families, friends and professionals

funded by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services

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## UNDERSTANDING HOSPICE

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- 1** *Hospice is a special concept of care, focused on providing comfort, relieving pain, and offering support for persons with life-limiting health conditions and their families.* Hospice provides pain and symptom relief, as well as emotional and spiritual support, typically in the last six months of life.
- 2** *Hospice care occurs wherever a person calls home.* Hospice is not a “place”; patients receive hospice care at home, and home is broadly defined. Home may be a person’s residence, a nursing home or an assisted living facility, or a residential hospice.
- 3** *Hospice is open to people of all ages, including children, and to people who have different medical conditions.* While approximately two out of three hospice patients are over the age of 65, hospice care is available across the lifespan. Hospice treats patients with Alzheimer’s disease, cancer, heart disease, HIV/AIDS, and other illnesses.
- 4** *Hospice services are available on-call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.* In addition to regular visits from the hospice team, families can reach hospice professionals any time with questions and concerns, and a hospice team member is available to deal with medical and other crises.
- 5** *Hospice professionals are committed to bringing pain under control as quickly as possible.* Needless pain can bring unnecessary anguish to a person who is dying and the loved ones caring for them.

- 6** *Many families who have been served by hospice wish that they had taken advantage of hospice services sooner.* Although hospice coverage is intended for patients with six months or less to live, the majority of patients spend far less than six months under hospice care, which makes it difficult to take full advantage of hospice's ability to make a patient's final days more peaceful and comfortable.
- 7** *Hospice staff is often present at a patient's death and is usually closely involved as death approaches.* This is one of hospice's greatest abilities, and can be one of the gifts that this care brings—helping the patient and his or her loved ones cope and understand what is happening as a person is dying.
- 8** *The costs of hospice care are generally covered under Medicare.* The Medicare Hospice Benefit covers the range of medical and supportive services—meaning psychological, emotional and spiritual services that are deemed “reasonable and necessary” by Medicare for managing a person's illness. Most state Medicaid programs offer hospice coverage, as do most private health insurance plans.
- 9** *Hospice care is available to patients for as long as the patient needs care.* As long as a physician certifies that the patient continues to meet guidelines for receiving hospice care, hospice is available in an unlimited number of 60-day periods.
- 10** *There are close to 5000 U.S. hospices, located in every state and serving all but the most rural or isolated communities.* In most situations, families can choose the hospice provider who best meets their needs, and have the option to change programs or revoke care if treatment goals change.

**For more information on hospice, grief and bereavement, or caregiving and end-of-life issues, please visit our website at [www.hospicefoundation.org/hfacares](http://www.hospicefoundation.org/hfacares) or call us at: 800-854-3402.**



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This Fact Sheet is provided through the support of a grant from the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to support hospice and end-of-life care outreach and education.

CMS funds of \$571,000 with HFA in-kind services of \$5,710 are funding a variety of outreach and educational programs, including this Fact Sheet.