

Increasing Numbers of Patients with Dementia and Other Non-Cancer Illnesses Benefit from Hospice Care

More and more Americans turn to hospice care when facing a life-limiting illness, and of these patients, a growing majority have an illness other than cancer. This is according to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), which recently published a report providing an overview of hospice care.

“When hospice first became available as a covered benefit under Medicare in 1963, the overwhelming majority of patients had cancer,” says Edo Banach, JD, NHPCO president and CEO. “That has changed in recent years as we’ve seen hospices caring for more people with a cardiac or circulatory diagnosis, a respiratory illness, and the fastest growing diagnosis of dementia.”

The report shows that almost 75% of people who started using hospice in 2016 (the most recent year information was available for the report) were admitted for an illness other than cancer. A total of 1.4 million Medicare patients were cared for that year.

However, the report also found that many people still use hospice for a short period, with more than 28% of hospice patients receiving hospice care for only seven days or less. “Hospice professionals continue to be concerned about the number of people who receive hospice care for a short period of time,” states the NHPCO. The report shows that just over 40% of Medicare hospice patients received care for 14 days or less in 2016, “which is considered too short a period for patients to fully benefit from the person-centered care available from hospice,” according to the NHPCO.

As Banach says, “The hospice...team is ideally suited to provide care and support to patients and family caregivers throughout the last months of life, not just the last days.” He adds, “We need to continue reaching out to patients, family caregivers, and other healthcare professionals to help them understand all the benefits that hospice care brings,

particularly when provided in a timely fashion as part of a continuum of care.”

For more information about the benefits of hospice care, please contact us.



How Hospice Can Help

- Hospice care can be provided wherever the patient lives.
- Physical symptoms are eased with medications and therapy.
- A patient’s emotional, social, and spiritual needs are all addressed by the hospice team.
- The hospice care plan is unique to each patient, based on the patient’s condition, values, and beliefs.
- The hospice team provides counseling and grief support for loved ones.

— Adapted from *Hospice Can Help* by Quality of Life Publishing Co.

Comfort Care Highlights in the News

Former First Lady Barbara Bush Chose Comfort Care, Inspiring Americans to Make Quality of Life a Priority

Many families across America choose the compassion of comfort care when a loved one is facing a serious illness. But one famous family made headline news in recent weeks.

Former First Lady Barbara Bush raised awareness of the benefits of hospice and palliative care when she decided to forgo curative care and chose comfort care during her final days.

Mrs. Bush suffered for years with congestive heart failure and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. As her condition worsened, she told her doctors and family that she no longer wanted to be hospitalized, where she would receive aggressive medical care. Instead, she wanted to go home, where she would be kept comfortable through palliative care and be able to spend her remaining days surrounded by family and friends.

The news media coverage of Mrs. Bush's decision was extensive. A headline in *Forbes* magazine stated, "Barbara Bush Leaves A Legacy: Champion For End-Of-Life Care." The article notes that her decision "is no surprise to those who knew Mrs. Bush and worked with her over the years, as she was an early champion of hospice programs for the terminally ill."

During her years as First Lady, Mrs. Bush often visited patients at the Washington Home for chronically ill patients and helped found the hospice program at that facility. In 1989 she made headlines when she was photographed holding a baby with AIDS.

The *Forbes* article continues, "Her personal decision decades later to begin comfort care at home, otherwise known as palliative care, also deeply resonated with families across the U.S. caring for their loved ones who are suffering with either long-term or terminal illnesses.

[These caregivers] are having to make difficult decisions with their family about quantity of life versus quality of life. And Barbara Bush chose, in the end, to forgo those additional life-extending treatments for quality time with her family."

To read the entire *Forbes* article, which explains the different types of comfort care available to patients and families, visit <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nicolefisher/2018/04/20/barbara-bush-leaves-a-legacy-champion-for-end-of-life-care/#4df17aafb979>.

Royal Couple Donates Wedding Flowers to Hospice

Another famous family recently helped raise awareness of the importance of hospice and palliative care.

Following their royal wedding, which was viewed on television by an estimated 30 million Americans, Prince

Harry and Meghan Markle donated their wedding flowers to a local hospice in London, England. The couple, now known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex, support hospice as one of their favorite charities.

Hospice care began in London a half century ago when Dame Cicely Saunders, a nurse, social worker, and physician, opened a hospice, revolutionizing the way society cares for the dying and bereaved. As Saunders once said, "You matter because you are you, and you matter to the last moment of your life." Her famous words have become the pillar of hospice philosophy worldwide.

In the U.S., more than 14 million patients and their families have benefited from the care and compassion of hospice professionals and volunteers.

Please contact us to learn more about how hospice and palliative care can help you or your loved one.



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