

As More Patients Choose Hospice, Experts Say 'All Americans Deserve Quality Care at the End of Life'

The number of Americans using hospice care continues to grow every year, according to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), which recently published a report providing an updated overview of hospice care in the U.S.

The report shows that more and more people are enrolling in hospice for non-cancer diagnoses. In fact, almost three-quarters of people who started using hospice in 2015 (the most recent year information was available for the report) were admitted for an illness other than cancer. It's now common for patients dealing with illnesses such as heart disease, dementia, respiratory disease, or stroke to enroll in hospice.

However, the report also found that many people still use hospice for a short period, and more than 28% of hospice patients only receive hospice care for seven days or less.

"The hospice interdisciplinary 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," emphasizes NHPCO president and CEO Edo Banach. "These highly trained professionals ensure that patients and families find dignity, respect, and love during one of life's most difficult journeys — it's really about living."

Banach and his team state that their overarching message is that "all Americans deserve quality care at the end of life — it's a fundamental part of living." Hospice care "is the model of high-quality, compassionate care that helps patients and families live as fully as possible."

Banach adds, "One of the most common regrets we hear from hospice patients and their families is that they delayed the decision to take advantage of hospice care."

He concludes, "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, visit www.nhpc.org, or contact your local hospice today.

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.

End-of-Life Care Highlights for Families

Music Brings Joy and Comfort to Patients at the End of Life

Many hospices and hospitals are finding that playing live music by a patient's bedside can bring joy, peace, and calmness, according to a recent report broadcast on the show "Morning Edition" from National Public Radio (NPR).

During the Middle Ages, it was common to use music as part of a bedside vigil when someone was ill, but that custom had lost favor over the centuries.

Now, this ancient tradition seems to be experiencing a revival. As one music therapist explains, "music taps into a part of the brain that doesn't require interpretation to communicate as words do, and that allows a direct connection to feelings."

Experts have found that music is hardwired into the brain. So even when a patient's brain is ravaged from Alzheimer's or other dementia, many of these patients can still recognize songs from their childhood and even sing along.

The musicians interviewed for the NPR report say they take time to tailor the music they play to each patient's interests and situation. Some patients want upbeat, familiar tunes from their youth. Others, who may be experiencing anxiety or pain, might want to hear soothing sounds that help ease suffering and bring comfort.

The result? Doctors and nurses report that music therapy helps increase quality of life not only for their patients, but also for the patients' families.

To listen to the NPR report or to read a transcript, visit <http://kalw.org/post/music-brings-healing-comfort-dying#stream/0>.

NHPCO Video Shows Benefits of Music Therapy for Patients

In related news, the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) has released a new video to showcase how music therapy can help hospice patients.

Titled "Mr. Gregg: the Life of the Party," the video features hospice patient Robert Gregg enjoying and responding during his music therapy sessions. Mr. Gregg is under the care of Seasons Hospice & Palliative Care.

"Music therapy has helped restore some of the lighter and more cheerful aspects of Mr. Gregg's personality and has been a positive addition to his care," says the NHPCO.

Mr. Gregg, who is dealing with symptoms of memory loss and agitation due to advanced illness, started participating in music therapy when a hospice aide realized he would react positively whenever she would sing to him.

Seasons Hospice & Palliative Care brought Sara Harris, a board-certified music therapist, into the patient's home to play guitar for him. "She offers a reassuring tempo that allows Mr. Gregg to adjust his breathing to sustain both happiness

and peace," explains the NHPCO.

Although at first Mr. Gregg's wife was uncertain whether music therapy would help, she noticed that her husband seemed happy during music therapy, moving his shoulders and toes to the music. In the video, he also sings, claps his hands, and smiles while Harris plays guitar for him.

"Music bridges a gap between their reality and our reality," music therapist Harris says. "And for families who may have not seen their loved ones speak or sing or anything the past few years, it's just absolutely priceless."

NHPCO president and CEO Edo Banach adds, "Music therapists help provide physical and emotional peace to patients and families at the end of life."

For more information, and to see the video, visit www.nhpco.org/press-room/press-releases/music-therapy-helps-hospice-patients-and-families.



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