

HOSPICE TOO LITTLE, TOO LATE
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In this day of the “information superhighway,” one area that is still sadly misunderstood by the public is Hospice. Hopefully, after reading this article, everyone will have a better understanding of Hospice.

Thomas A. Scully, from CMS (Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services), released a letter showing CMS’s support of hospice care. In his letter he stated, “Hospice care is an essential Medicare benefit that can bring physical and emotional care to the terminally ill individual and his or her family when life nears its end.”

CMS also published an article entitled, “End-of Life Care Enhances Dignity and Peace As Life Nears Its End.” This article provides information about the benefits of hospice services to terminally ill patients. The following information is excerpts from this article:

- 1. Increasing numbers of Americans - and their physicians - now recognize that much of the pain and sense of hopelessness that accompany terminal illness can be eased by services designed specifically to help them: services that are covered by Medicare (and Medicaid in the state of Indiana). End-of-life care offers the satisfaction of easing physical and emotional pain through effective palliative treatment when cure is not possible.**
- 2. The majority of care (a hospice provides) is offered to those who will die from cancer; but the hospice setting also is appropriate for patients who suffer from lung disease or end-stage heart ailments, and for terminally ill AIDS patients.**
- 3. Hospice care is primarily a specialized type of home health care.**
- 4. Medicare covers a number of specific services...Covered services include: Medical and nursing care, medical equipment, pharmaceutical therapy for pain relief and symptom control, home health aide services, social work services, physical, occupational and speech therapy, diet counseling, bereavement and other counseling services and case management.**
- 5. Originally defined in the Latin word “hospitium” (“guesthouse”) as a shelter for weary and sick travelers, modern hospice care thrives to this day because a growing number of Americans in the health care profession, the counseling community, the government, and mainstream society recognize that palliative care is a special and valuable way of easing the pain and emotional stress for people who are approaching the end of life’s journey.**
- 6. Hospice is not about death, but rather about the quality of life as it nears its end, for all concerned - the patient, family and friends, and the health professional community. Some patients have the misconception that if they sign up for Hospice and live longer than**

six months they will be discharged from Hospice, at a time when they need Hospice the most. There are also physicians that are apprehensive about placing a patient on Hospice because they fear the patient will live longer than six months and they will be in trouble for fraud. These two concerns were also addressed in the Thomas A. Scully letter. Scully stated, “We recognize that making these determinations is not an exact science and that the impact of a hospice’s services may, initially, improve the patients condition. Thus, Medicare regulations use the terms “expectancy” and “if the terminal illness runs its normal course” in its definition to indicate that it is entirely possible for hospice services to be needed for more than a 6-month period. In further recognition of the difficulty in making exact predictions, physicians certifying Medicare patients for hospice are expected only to use their best “clinical judgment regarding the normal course of the individual’s illness.”“

Sadly most people do not begin receiving hospice care until the last 50 days of their life. There are some patients that begin hospice care as late as 1 day to 2 weeks before the end of their life, which is very discouraging to me as a Registered Nurse. When a patient comes to you in the last week of their life you realize that there was so much more that you could of done for this patient and their family, if only you could of begun seeing them sooner.

If you have questions about hospice or have someone you would like to refer to hospice services please feel free to contact Hoosier Uplands Home Health Care & Hospice at 812-849-4447 or 800-827-2219 and ask for Dawn Robinson, RN, Patient Care Coordinator.

**You may also look up additional information about hospice on the internet at:
<http://www.medicare.gov/Publications/Pubs/pdf/02154.pdf>**