



The Transition Toolkit: A Guide to Understanding Hospice Care

Answering the ten most common questions to help your family find comfort, dignity, and quality of life.

**Curing an
Illness**



**Caring for
a Person**

A Shift in Focus: From Curing an Illness to Caring for a Person

Choosing hospice care is one of the most significant decisions a family can make. It represents a fundamental shift in goals, prioritizing comfort, dignity, and the quality of the life that is being lived. This guide is designed to walk you through the most common questions, providing clarity and support as you navigate this transition.

What is the difference between hospice and palliative care?

While both focus on comfort, their timing and goals are distinct.



Palliative Care

- **Goal:** Improve quality of life during any stage of a serious illness.
- **Timing:** Can begin at the moment of diagnosis.
- **Treatment:** Can be received alongside curative care meant to treat the disease.



Hospice Care

- **Goal:** Provide comfort and dignity when a cure is no longer sought.
- **Timing:** Begins when life expectancy is typically 6 months or less.
- **Treatment:** Focuses entirely on comfort; curative treatments are stopped.

Does choosing hospice mean we are “giving up”?

It is not about giving up on life. It is about choosing how you want to live the time you have left.

“Families frequently say their only regret was not starting hospice sooner.”

Research shows that by managing pain and reducing the stress of ER visits, the intensive support of hospice can sometimes help people live longer and more comfortably.



How do I know if my loved one is eligible for hospice?



Two doctors must certify that a patient has a terminal illness with a life expectancy of six months or less if the disease runs its normal course.

Hospice provides support for many conditions, including:



Advanced heart disease (CHF)



Dementia and Alzheimer's



Lung disease (COPD)



Kidney or liver failure



Neurological diseases (Parkinson's, ALS)



The team also looks for signs of decline, such as frequent hospital visits, significant weight loss, or an increasing struggle with daily activities.

Where does hospice care take place?

Hospice is a service, not a place.

The vast majority of care is provided wherever the patient calls “home.” This can be a private house, an assisted living community, or a nursing home.

If a patient is in a facility, the hospice team works alongside the facility staff, providing an extra layer of specialized comfort care.



What services are actually included in the hospice benefit?

The benefit is designed to cover everything related to the terminal illness.



The Care Team

Regular visits from nurses, aides, and social workers.



Medical Equipment

Hospital beds, oxygen, wheelchairs, and walkers.



Medical Supplies

Bandages, catheters, and incontinence supplies.



Medications

All drugs for pain and symptom management related to the illness.



24/7 Support

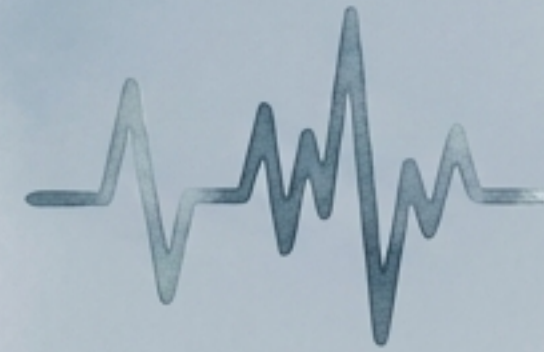
Access to a nurse by phone at any time, day or night.

The Four Levels of Care: Adapting to Your Needs



Routine Care

The standard level of support provided in your home on a regular schedule.



Continuous Care

Short-term, intensive nursing care provided at the bedside during a brief medical crisis to avoid a hospital trip.



Inpatient Care

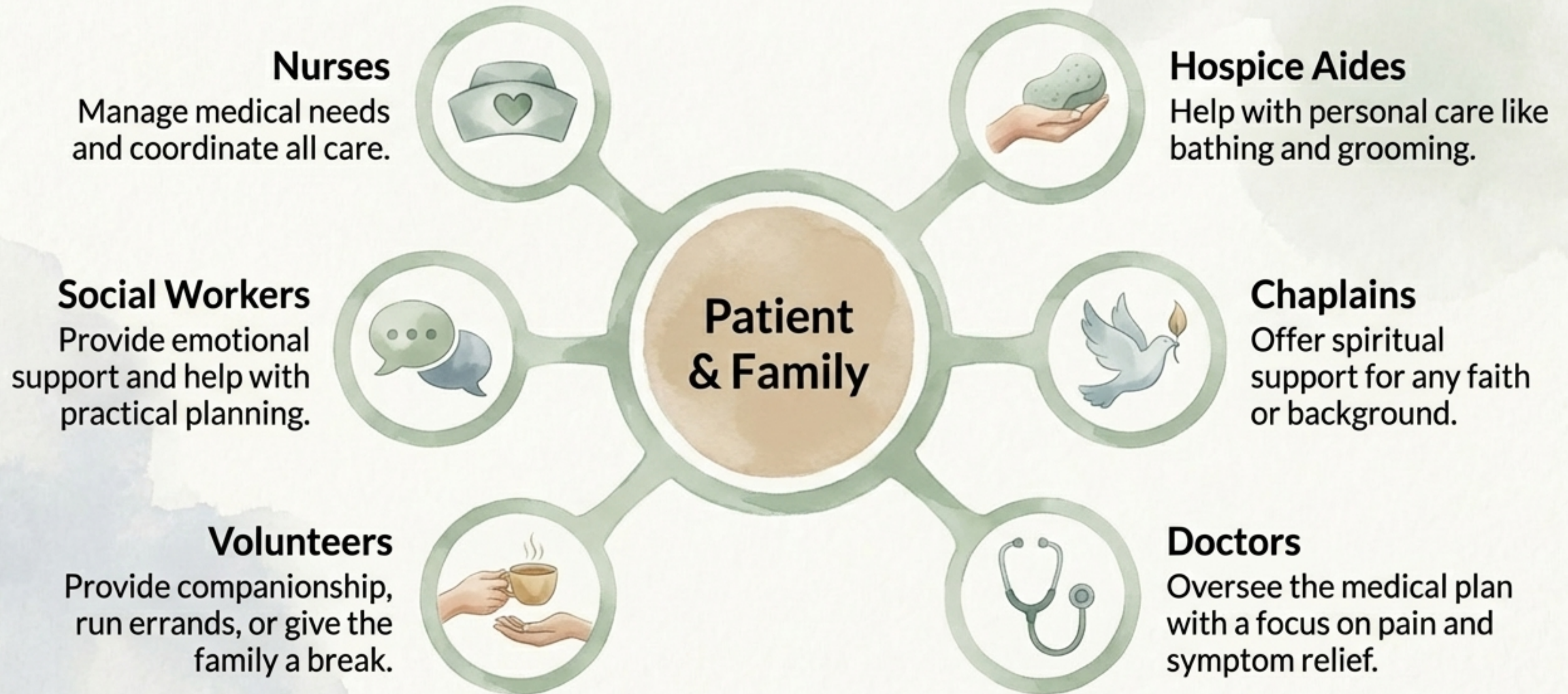
A short-term stay in a facility for symptoms like severe pain that cannot be managed at home.



Respite Care

A stay of up to five days in a facility, provided to give the family caregiver a much-needed break.

You are not alone: Meet your Interdisciplinary Care Team



Hospice treats the whole family, not just the patient.

We provide robust support for caregivers and loved ones.



Caregiver Training

Our nurses teach you how to confidently manage medications, use equipment, and provide care.



Respite Care

We can arrange for your loved one to stay in a facility for up to five days, allowing you to rest and recharge.



Bereavement Support

After a loved one passes, our support continues for at least 13 months with grief counseling, support groups, and check-ins.

What is the cost of hospice care?

For most people, hospice costs very little or nothing at all.



Medicare & Medicaid

These government benefits typically cover 100% of the cost of hospice care, including team visits, medications, and equipment.



Private Insurance

Most private plans also offer a robust hospice benefit.

Important Note

While hospice covers all *medical care*, it generally does not cover 'room and board' costs. You are still responsible for rent or fees if you live in a nursing home or assisted living facility.

What if my loved one lives longer than six months?

The “six-month rule” is an eligibility guideline, not a time limit on care.

A patient can remain in hospice as long as a doctor continues to certify that they have a terminal prognosis. Some patients' conditions stabilize or even improve so much under hospice care that they no longer qualify. In these cases, they can be "graduated" from hospice and can always re-enroll later if their condition changes.



How do we get started?

The process is straightforward and often faster than people expect.

1

Referral

Anyone—a family member, a friend, or the patient—can call a hospice to ask for an evaluation. You do not need to wait for a doctor.



2

Assessment

A hospice nurse will visit, often within 24 hours, to explain the program and confirm the patient qualifies.



3

Election

If you decide to proceed, you sign an "Election of Benefits" form to officially choose hospice care.



4

Start of Care

The team begins scheduled visits, and necessary medical equipment is delivered to your home.



A Guide to Choosing a Quality Provider

Look for objective data on the official Medicare Care Compare website.
High-performing agencies often score well in these key areas:



Quality Indicator: Communication

What it Means for You: How well the team keeps you and your family informed.



Quality Indicator: Timely Help

What it Means for You: How quickly a nurse responds to after-hours or weekend calls.



Quality Indicator: Respectful Care

What it Means for You: Whether the team consistently treats the patient with dignity.



Quality Indicator: Symptom Help

What it Means for You: How effectively the team manages challenging symptoms like pain and breathing issues.



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