Targeting Resource Use Effectively (TRUE)  
Hospice Utilization Project  
Frequently Asked Questions about Hospice

**Question**: What is hospice?

**Answer**: Hospice is a philosophy of care that is available through the Medicare and most insurances as a “benefit” that includes professionals and volunteers to address the physical, spiritual, financial, emotional needs of the terminally ill patient and his/her family.

**Question**: What does “terminal” mean?

**Answer**: Medicare defines “terminal” as a prognosis of six months or less of life expectancy if the disease runs its predicted course.

**Question**: What happens if I live longer than six months?

**Answer**: You will continue to receive services from hospice as long you meet the eligibility criteria. There is no limit on the number of days you can be in the hospice program. The limit is defined by eligibility criteria established by Medicare and reviewed by the Hospice Interdisciplinary Team every 15 days or less.

**Question**: How will I know if my loved one or I am eligible for hospice care?

**Answer**: By discussing your current health status and treatment plan with your physician or with a hospice provider. They will discuss the opportunities for hospice care with you or with your loved one.

**Question**: If I enroll in hospice, can I choose to “opt out” at a later date?

**Answer**: A patient may choose to “revoke” or “opt out” of their hospice benefit at any time and re-enroll at a later date without any penalties or liabilities.

**Question**: I hear the main service hospice provides is the management of physical pain. Is that all they do?

**Answer**: The management of physical pain and symptom control by the physicians and nurses is only part of the spectrum of care available through hospice. Services by a social worker may include discussion of goals, funeral planning, financial concerns, facilitation of family conferences, or grief counseling. Services by the chaplain/counselor may be to provide support through spiritual or emotional counseling. The hospice medical director meets with the hospice staff routinely to provide oversight to the plan of care for each patient and family. In other words, hospice services focus on holistic care whose goals are to identify and meet the patient and family’s needs.
**Question:** Who pays for hospice?

**Answer:** Medicare, Medical Assistance, most insurance companies, some long-term care insurances, or you can privately pay for hospice.

**Question:** If insurance pays, why do most hospice programs raise money?

**Answer:** Hospice programs are reimbursed on a per diem (daily capped amount) regardless of the type of care that is needed or the cost of services. Some patient’s care totals are less in expense than the daily amount, while most run higher than the daily reimbursement.

**Question:** Whom does hospice employ?

**Answer:** Registered nurses, a Medical Director (physician), Licensed Social Worker, Chaplain/Counselor, Therapists (Physical, Occupational, Speech) Registered Dietician, LPN’s, hospice aides, and homemakers. While it is not a requirement, some agencies have added massage therapist, music therapists, and others to their services.

**Question:** What role do volunteers play in hospice care?

**Answer:** Volunteers provide a support in the way in which paid staff is not able to, both in the active phase of life, but also in bereavement follow-up and support for the family. Volunteers are integral to the success of the hospice services.

**Question:** Where does hospice provide care?

**Answer:** Hospice services are available to patients wherever they may reside. This includes a private home, assisted living, long term care facility, hospital, group home, foster home, or apartment dwelling.

**Question:** Will hospice care be available to me 24 hours per day, seven days per week?

**Answer:** Hospice provides a registered nurse on-call 24/7. Intermittent visits by hospice staff and volunteers are made on an individual planned and on an “as needed basis.” Hospice does not provide staff in attendance 24 hours per day. Hospice will assist the patient and family in making arrangements for 24 hours of care if that is what needed. Hospice ensures access to pharmacy, physician services and durable medical equipment is available 365 days per year for to meet the patient’s needs.

**Question:** Can I get more information on hospice?

**Answer:** You can call your local hospice agencies or visit the Minnesota Hospice and Palliative Care website found at [http://www.Minnesotahpc.org/](http://www.Minnesotahpc.org/) to locate hospice programs throughout Minnesota. To find a hospice program in another state, visit the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization’s web site at [http://www.nhpco.org/](http://www.nhpco.org/). The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services provides information on the hospice benefit located on their website at [www.cms.gov](http://www.cms.gov).

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