



Featured VITAS Expert

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Hospice Basics and Benefits

GOAL: To help hospice and healthcare professionals understand the history, philosophy and practice of hospice care and palliative care, including common myths and misconceptions, common diagnoses for hospice referrals, identification of hospice-eligible patients, reimbursement for hospice services, and the benefits of advance care planning and early referrals.

Key Takeaways:

1. Hospice is a service and medical specialty for patients with an advanced illness and a certified prognosis of six months or less if the illness runs its normal course. Palliative care, typically provided in a hospital, focuses on symptom/pain management, quality of life and psychosocial support at any stage of an advanced illness. Hospice, typically provided in the patient's preferred setting, is a type of palliative care focused on symptom management and quality of life near the end of life for advanced illness patients.
2. The most common diagnoses for hospice care are advanced cardiac disease, advanced lung disease, Alzheimer's/dementia, advanced cancer, sepsis and others. Services can be provided to any hospice-eligible patient facing advanced illness at the end of life.
3. Symptoms that emerge near the end of life include unrelieved pain, dyspnea, anorexia, dysphagia, nausea/vomiting, itching, disrupted sleep, cachexia, profound weakness/confusion/restlessness, bowel obstruction and psychosocial/spiritual issues.
4. The interdisciplinary hospice team includes a physician, nurse, aide, social worker, chaplain, bereavement specialist and volunteer. The four levels of mandated hospice care are: routine home care, continuous care up to 24 hours (when medically necessary), inpatient hospice care and respite care.
5. Medicare Part A covers up to 100% of the cost of care related to a patient's hospice diagnosis. Many private insurers cover hospice. Medicaid coverage varies by state.
6. Experts agree that hospice is more effective when it is offered for weeks or months, not days, and when patients/families embrace advance care planning early in the process.

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