Letters & Stories from
VITAS Patients and Their Families
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VITAS is guided by its core values:

- Patients and families come first.
- We take care of each other.
- I’ll do my best today and do even better tomorrow.
- I’m proud to make a difference.
Dear Reader,

At VITAS, our core value of “Patients and families come first” is the driving force behind our company mission—to provide the highest-quality care and compassion to patients and families who are facing a terminal illness and who have chosen hospice as their plan of care at the end of life.

This book features letters and stories from real people that we hope will help you see that choosing hospice, especially VITAS Healthcare, could prove to be one of the best and most important decisions you could make for yourself or your loved one, should you find yourself facing a terminal illness.

These stories illustrate that choosing hospice is not about choosing to “give up.” On the contrary, choosing hospice is about embracing life—when life matters most. And when you choose VITAS, you are putting yourself and your loved one in the hands of skilled professionals who love what they do and who care deeply about the people they serve.

I receive letters like these every day from our more than 50 programs across the country. These stories make me proud of VITAS—proud of its reputation as the nation’s leading provider of hospice care since 1978; proud of its dedicated, hard-working employees who provide the highest-quality physical, emotional and spiritual care and support to patients and their families; and proud of our consistent 95-percent customer satisfaction rating across the nation.

Taking care of terminally ill patients and their families is a privilege and an honor that we take very seriously at VITAS. Deciding whether or not to choose hospice is not an easy one, but once you make the decision we vow to make you and your loved one’s journey as peaceful and comfortable as possible—just like we did for those whose words are captured here.

Sincerely,

Timothy S. O’Toole
Chief Executive Officer, VITAS Healthcare Corporation
An Introduction to VITAS

VITAS Healthcare® was founded in Miami, Florida, in 1978. The name VITAS (pronounced VEE-tahs) is derived from the Latin word “vita,” which means “lives,” and symbolizes our company mission: To preserve the quality of life for those who have a limited time to live.

Since its inception, VITAS has been a pioneer in the national hospice movement, helping to define and continuously elevate the standards of care for hospice in the United States. Today, Americans receive hospice care as part of a federal benefit covered by Medicare, Medicaid and most commercial insurance plans.

In 2004, VITAS became a wholly owned subsidiary of Chemed Corporation, which is publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE:CHE) and is headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio.

VITAS has cared for more than a million patients since 1978. Patients and families choose VITAS for a number of reasons:

• VITAS is known for providing the highest quality care from multi-disciplinary teams of specially trained physicians, nurses, home health aides, social workers, chaplains, and other professionals.

• VITAS consistently receives 95-percent satisfaction ratings from patients and their families, who trust VITAS because of its strong reputation as a leading provider of end-of-life care and who continuously recommend its services to their loved ones.

• Similarly, the healthcare community trusts VITAS’ high-quality hospice services and for investing in technology and systems and procedures for upholding and maintaining the highest industry standards in compliance and regulatory requirements.

As the need for quality end-of-life care has grown over the years, VITAS has continued to expand to meet an increasing demand for its services and will continue to do so to meet the needs of our nation’s growing aging population.
VITAS Inpatient Hospice Units
A home away from home

When VITAS patients require higher levels of care that cannot be provided wherever they call “home,” VITAS inpatient hospice units (IPU) offer a “home away from home” with maximum comfort, peace and dignity.

**Broward, Florida**
When my aunt died two years ago, her last days were in the care of the VITAS staff in Winter Park. Her caregivers helped to make her death as natural, special and miraculous as a birth. I appreciated their humor, wisdom, compassion, efficiency, calm, encouragement, cleanliness and patience. —Appreciative Niece

**Los Angeles, California**
Headed by the team manager, Manny, the VITAS hospice services my father received were wonderful. From the housekeeping services, to the nurses, chaplain, and doctor, they were all so patient and attentive to my dad’s needs and our fears and concerns. The nurses knew exactly what to say to console us, and any grimace my dad displayed was immediately attended to, to ensure he was in a peaceful and relaxed state, free of any pain. They kept him clean—no rashes—talked to him, turned him so he wasn’t in the same position, and even sprayed him with some cologne! The two weeks he was there, the team treated my dad like he was their own family member as well as us. It’s a hard thing to go through ... but this group I feel you can trust to take care of your loved ones. —Laura

**Dallas, Texas**
The staff at the Inpatient Hospice Unit for VITAS are exceptional! They cared for and supported our family during one of the hardest times in our life. They helped us understand what was going on and what to expect. With the information they gave us, it made a difficult situation bearable. Their knowledge and compassion is obvious. I would recommend VITAS Inpatient Hospice Unit to anyone who is considering it. Thank you, everyone, for all you did for our family! —Holly

**Cincinnati, Ohio**
We are sending our deepest and warmest thank you for the care given to our mother during her stay at the inpatient unit. We cannot begin to thank you enough for the compassion, comfort, dignity and professionalism which you all showed in helping our mom and our family in her time of need. —Valerie
As a pioneer of the hospice movement in the United States, VITAS has established—and maintains—strict standards of quality and excellence in patient and family care. It’s no exaggeration to say that VITAS wrote the book—two books, in fact—that define and set the standards for hospice care, including describing how it should be provided, how it should be documented and how patients’ pain levels should be measured and managed. VITAS not only recognizes but exceeds the Standards of Practice for Hospice Programs adopted by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, and VITAS continues to be the leader in creating innovative approaches to patient and family care. As the letters featured in this book attest, our patients’ and families’ experiences affirm our high level of compassion as well as our high level of compliance with hospice standards.

Bob Miller
Senior Vice President of Operations and Compliance Officer

“...”
VITAS Telecare
Night or day, rain or shine, VITAS is here to help

When any of our patients or their family members—anywhere in the U.S.—have questions or concerns after normal business hours, they can get immediate answers and help by calling VITAS Telecare, which operates 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, to speak to our hospice nurses.

This service is particularly helpful for patients who are most vulnerable to confusion or disorientation, as they feel better and calmer at home, surrounded by their own belongings and with their loved ones nearby. This means our patients don’t have to choose between the comforts of home and the round-the-clock care of hospitalization. VITAS also provides Intensive Comfort Care®, a service that puts trained clinicians at our patients’ bedsides up to 24 hours a day.

Mary Zalaznik
Senior Vice President of Operations

“One aspect of VITAS that I have always been so proud of is its development of the interdisciplinary team approach to patient and family care. When the founders of VITAS took on their first patient in 1978—a strong-willed lady who insisted on dying at home, in comfort and with dignity—they set about developing a model of care that attended to her medical, psychosocial and spiritual needs. We often receive letters in which each member of a care team is mentioned by name for having brought something special to a patient and his/her family, and that, to me, just drives home the fact that we are doing the right thing.”

Fort Worth, Texas

I was very impressed with VITAS. They have nurses who are available to answer questions via telephone around-the-clock who are very knowledgeable about symptoms related to the patient’s current diagnosis. They were able to give advice over the phone on how to relieve patient symptoms without using extra medicine or making a visit to the ER necessary. The nurse took her time, explained everything
and knew exactly what she was talking about. I was very impressed with VITAS’ after-hours help line. —Michael

**Atlanta, Georgia**
Everyone at VITAS was professional, from the nurses, doctors, the people who delivered the equipment and even the nurses we spoke to on the after-hours team. In fact there were a few times we had to call the after-hours people, and every time, they guided us through the process and helped us however we needed. My whole family was very pleased and thankful to VITAS. —Mary

**Kansas City, Kansas**
VITAS took very good care of my dad for a week. I would absolutely recommend their services. I could call them 24/7. When I called them, they called me right back or sent someone right to the house. They provided whatever I needed. —Linda

**Forth Worth, Texas**
We are extremely grateful to each of the staff who assisted us in the care and comfort of my wife in her final days and particularly her final hours. Their responsiveness to our needs in caring for her at any time of the day or night whether it be instructions over the phone or dispatching a nurse cannot be overstated. Thanks to each and every one of you. —Frank

**Cincinnati, Ohio**
You were recommended by a nurse at a retirement community that I work at. I was lost when I found out that my father was ill. When I was told he had only three months to live, I never thought of how he might be incapacitated. You were there to help guide me and to give me strength to care for my dad. You were concerned how we were doing as a family, both emotionally and spiritually.

I felt comfortable knowing that I could call at any time and that I would receive a phone call back promptly or that someone would come. No one was ever exasperated or tired of our questions.

Please know that I am eternally grateful. I cannot thank you enough for being there for my family. Dad passed away very quietly and comfortably. He had no fear because of his faith in God and because of the care that your team gave him. —Susan
VITAS HME Solutions
Bringing hospice care medical equipment ‘home’

VITAS has its own division of Home Medical Equipment (HME) Solutions, which has trained VITAS specialists who deliver medical equipment to patients’ homes.

East Bay, California
VITAS sent a great nurse to help my mother in her last month of life. I think a lot may depend on the nurse you get, no matter what agency. The agency has managed to have this truly great nurse working for them, for a number of years, and I’m sure she has her choice of where to work. They brought supplies, delivered medications, coordinated the equipment, etc. No complaints. —Lisa

Broward, Florida
My family and I didn’t really know what hospice was, and we had no idea that they would provide the equipment too. The nurses were very kind and took great care of my uncle. We were kept in the loop about his care and even comforted when things got too hard to bear. The guys who brought the equipment were very nice and explained how to use the machines. We can’t thank them enough. —Maria

San Antonio, Texas
VITAS team, you were a godsend. Thank you from my whole family for caring for my sister as if she were your sister. We were always so impressed by your professionalism, but most of all we were impressed with the loving care you provided. Thank you to the doctors, nurses, social worker and the people who brought the supplies, which was a tremendous help. —Jerry
Dallas, Texas

VITAS made all the difference in the quality of my mom’s life before and even during her death. Because of VITAS, my mom was able to live the last months of her life without any pain, without any financial worries and she was always completely comfortable.

Everyone at VITAS was accessible, professional, kind, compassionate, respectful, and very attentive and loving toward my mom and our family. Every time I needed to ask a question or had an emergency, I was able to contact VITAS immediately and receive immediate help. The gentlemen who delivered the hospital bed and oxygen machines were extremely polite and respectful. We received visits from a wonderful gentleman who checked to make sure the oxygen was working properly and taught me how to use the emergency back-up tanks.

VITAS not only made my mom’s life better for her, but also better for all of us in the family. Without their support, their advice, compassion, and skill, and daily visits—sometimes more than once a day—I don’t know how we would have been able to provide proper care for my mom and make sure she had no pain or worries. For this, our family is eternally grateful to VITAS, and we recommend them to anyone who has a family member who is in need. —D.L.
VITAS Veterans Outreach

Every day is Veterans Day at VITAS

VITAS’ award-winning veterans’ programs are widely recognized for their commitment to honor veterans’ preferences and provide them with the respect, comfort and compassion they require and deserve at the end of life. As part of its commitment to veterans, VITAS has Veteran Liaisons who work closely with the Veterans Administration (VA), Medicare, Medicaid and other local organizations toward that goal. When admitting patients to hospice, VITAS conducts a special assessment for every veteran patient to determine the specific level of support he or she needs and to provide customized care.

San Francisco Bay, California

On behalf of my sister and myself, I would like to thank your Veterans Representative, John, for his extraordinary efforts to assemble replacement medals and rank patches from my dad’s time in the service during WWII. The originals had been long lost. While my dad was under VITAS care back in August and September, I read that the VA connection to VITAS could possibly find or replace lost medals and patches. I was intrigued. It would be a part of my dad’s past that I had always wanted to know more about.

My dad served in the U.S. Army in WWII in a tank division and was witness to many horrific things. After his discharge, he served in the U.S. Army reserves and then in the U.S. Air Force. When he returned to civilian life, he spoke very little about his time in the service and so we never knew much about his military past. None-the-less he kept close ties with the VA by supporting the various military organizations such as the U.S.O., the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the Wounded Soldiers and others. He was always grateful for the aid the VA hospital gave him when his physical and mental health failed him.

We will miss him always and never forget him. John’s lovely shadow box presentation of the medals and patches will sit beside the flag that the U.S. Honor Guard presented us at dad’s funeral. They will stand as a gentle reminder of dad and his service to us and his country.

Thank you again, John, and those who support him in his efforts to make a very hard time for the family of vets a bit more validated and respected. —Lynda
My father was in the military, so one of the initiatives at VITAS that is near and dear to my heart is our specialized care for military veterans. VITAS has carefully developed a protocol specifically for identifying patients who are military veterans and for addressing their unique needs. We have had so many family members of patients who were in the military thank us for our help, because they didn’t know until VITAS entered their lives that they were entitled to government benefits or that their father or uncle was entitled to a proper military ceremony, complete with a 21-gun salute, at his funeral. It is such an honor to serve these patients and families, considering the sacrifices they have made. They often thank us, but really, we thank them for the privilege to serve them.

Patty Husted
Senior Vice President of Operations
VITAS Volunteers
Vital members of the VITAS team

VITAS recognizes the important role that volunteers play in each patient’s care plan. Volunteers bring to its patients’ bedsides a high level of energy, warmth and compassion that complement the services provided by the professional healthcare workers who comprise the rest of the team.

Volunteers are as diverse as the patients they serve, representing all ages, ethnic backgrounds and lifestyles, and ranging from students to retirees. Some volunteers are moving through their own grief processes after having lost loved ones. Some are military veterans who now support other veterans facing the end of life. VITAS even has musical and artist volunteers who use their talents to soothe patients.

The experience is highly beneficial and rewarding for everyone involved, including volunteers, who usually decide to stay on for years after experiencing the rewarding feeling of giving back and seeing the positive impacts of their work.

Newark, Delaware
My dad used to be a musician. It made dad so happy when VITAS would send their musical volunteer who would play his guitar. It was small things like this that really made VITAS stand out, plus with such giving and dedicated volunteers, you can tell the company values its patients. Forever grateful. —Samantha

Houston, Texas
All the nurses were great. They were friendly, knowledgeable, respectful and compassionate. The doctors listened to our concerns and everyone involved made sure that mom was comfortable, even the music volunteer. When we found out about the different therapies available to mom, we knew music was what she needed, as it was a big part of her life before she got sick. We are thankful to everyone at VITAS for their love and attention. —Marjorie
Stories from VITAS volunteers

Dallas, Texas
I am a middle school teacher and brought some of my students to the VITAS office to volunteer and earn community service hours. The volunteer manager at VITAS was very helpful, friendly and the kids loved her! Because of their young age, my students were only able to complete clerical work in the VITAS office, but they had a fun time. It was a chance for them to see what the “real world” was all about. At the end of their two-hour shifts, the students always asked the volunteer manager if they could stay longer. I would highly recommend VITAS for anyone looking for a satisfying volunteer experience. If my students and I had a great time in the office just folding and labeling fliers, you will have a great time working one-on-one with hospice patients! —Christina

Wauwatosa, Milwaukee
I’ve been a volunteer with VITAS for three years. When my grandmother went through her own end-of-life journey, I was able to witness—first hand—the incredible work hospice nurses do, especially the volunteers. I recall that grandma’s volunteer would check-in on her and spend time listening to her when we couldn’t be there ourselves. After grandma passed away, I knew that I wanted to “pay it forward” by volunteering my time with others who were in need of a friend. I have met amazing patients with incredible stories during my time as a volunteer. I feel honored to have shared those moments with patients and their families. I feel close to my grandmother each time I visit someone that reminds me of her. And it makes me happy to bring a smile or just provide a listening ear to a patient in need. —Lucy

Chicago, Illinois
I’ve been a volunteer with VITAS for the past six years. I never thought I would be a hospice volunteer but that changed after my sister died and I wasn’t able to spend time with her when she passed. When I learned about hospice, I felt a calling to make sure that families in my community did not experience dying alone like my sister did. I find it very rewarding to meet patients and their families, hear stories of them when they were younger and spend time with them during their time of grief. I feel privileged to be part of their inner circle and I am honored to be there for them during such an important time of their lives. —Johnny
Brian Davis  
Vice President of Operations

“While there is no doubt that VITAS has the best employees in hospice care, I am also consistently impressed with the quality of care and dedication that our volunteers demonstrate. The Medicare Hospice Benefit requires that at least five percent of all patient care be provided by volunteers—be it at the bedside or in the office. And it simply amazes me how our volunteers give of their time and their talents, their energy and their compassion to help our patients and their families. And they help in so many ways—sewing a Memory Bear or knitting a lap robe, stuffing envelopes, playing music for patients, or just sitting with a patient and playing cards, watching TV or holding a hand. Our volunteers are important to our mission, and we cannot thank them enough.”
Our VITAS Paw Pals team, consists of a growing number of dogs, cats, birds and even horses, who are specially trained alongside their owners to provide comfort and a special kind of friendship to hospice patients. Paw Pals and their owners visit patients in nursing homes, assisted living facilities and private homes. Their owners range in age from teenagers to senior citizens.

Healthcare experts say that hospice patients are noticeably more active and responsive during and after animal visits. Stroking dogs and cats has proved to reduce people’s blood pressure and make it easier for people to talk. Animals provide a constant source of comfort by making people feel safe and unconditionally accepted.

Paw Pals visits can provide hospice patients with a welcome change from their daily routine and often bring back fond memories and generate lots of smiles and laughter. Paw Pals volunteers alleviate loneliness with their unconditional love. There’s nothing like it!

Palm Beach, Florida
My family and I can't thank VITAS enough! The care you provided to Mom was immeasurable. All of the nurses were so kind to us and took great care of Mom. The volunteer and her dog were such a joy. Every time Mom would see Max, her eyes would light up. It's amazing what a difference her time with the dog made. —Sheila

Newark, Delaware
When my husband and I found out that his dad needed hospice, we felt lost. VITAS was a godsend! We are grateful to everyone, from the doctor, the nurses and even the
volunteer and his dog who sat with my father-in-law for over an hour a couple of times every week. Thank you VITAS! —Carol

Chicago, Illinois
To the entire staff at VITAS, we are eternally grateful for the care you provided to my aunt. We were so impressed by the compassion and love you gave to her. She was always bathed and the nurse always made sure that her feet were warm. We were even more taken aback when the volunteer came with her cat, who would sit next to my aunt and purr as my aunt pet her. They seemed like the best of friends. We were so happy with the care provided to her. Thank you so much to our VITAS family, we love you! —Tim

LaSalle, Illinois
Dear VITAS team, my dad passed away one year ago and I could not have cared for him without you. The team was wonderful and helped me to work the machines and even how to accept death. It is special people who can do this every day. I was very happy with the volunteer and her dog who spent so much time sitting with my dad and keeping him company. Even when it became hard for him to talk, I could always see his eyes smiling when there. —Larry
The following are some stories from VITAS volunteers

San Francisco, California
My dog Harry is a Paw Pals volunteer at VITAS. I really appreciate how everyone at VITAS makes you feel welcome and sincerely thanks you for volunteering your time. Each time I visit a patient and get to meet the VITAS staff caring for them, the staff always tells me how much they appreciate that Harry and I can visit the patient. The joy and inner peace you feel after spending time with the patients is incredible. That is why I enjoy my role as a volunteer so much. —Madeline

Livingston, New Jersey
I’ve always enjoyed sewing for fun or for family members, like costumes for my grandkids, or quilts for my own children. When I found out I could volunteer my sewing skills to craft Memory Bears for families who were grieving a loved one, I signed up right away. In the past two years since becoming a hospice volunteer with VITAS, I have sewed about two dozen Memory Bears. My favorite one was for a family whose loved one had served in World War II. He was an Army General and they wanted me to use camouflage fabric to craft the Memory Bear in his honor. I delivered the bear personally to the family because I knew how much they would treasure it. Meeting the family and handing them the bear was one of my most rewarding moments I’ve had as a volunteer. —Joy

Naples, Florida
I began volunteering in hospice with my cat Mr. Snuggles after my mom passed away. During mom’s last days with us, she would enjoy stroking Mr. Snuggles’ soft silky fur. He always purred for her and would lie quietly on her lap. Months after mom passed, I remembered how well she responded to Mr. Snuggles so I decided to take VITAS’ volunteer training session to learn about how Mr. Snuggles could provide comfort to others in hospice. Mr. Snuggles and I enjoy our time with hospice patients. Mr. Snuggles’ gentle and calm demeanor allows patients to stroke him and “chat” with him. As soon as we walk into a patient’s home, we are greeted quite warmly. I hope that together, Mr. Snuggles and I can continue our visits to hospice patients for a long time. —Susan
VITAS Access Initiatives
Serving the ‘underserved’ in our communities

The goal of VITAS’ pioneering Access Initiatives program is to educate and advocate for those who are typically underserved by hospice. This includes African Americans, Hispanics and other people of color, military veterans, Jews, Muslims, Buddhists and any others who, due to their cultural or religious beliefs, may not understand or be aware of hospice care.

Statistics show that a disproportionate number of these populations never receive appropriate end-of-life care, because they don’t know that hospice is covered by Medicare, Medicaid and most private insurance plans.

VITAS Access Initiatives, or community outreach, is committed to making sure everyone is aware of this important and much-needed benefit. Through senior centers and in churches, in assisted living communities and in VA hospitals, in classrooms, at health fairs and at community events wherever VITAS cares for patients, VITAS representatives provide facts that give people the information and the access they need to make informed end-of-life decisions—long before they reach the end of life.

Miami, Florida
My family and I would like to thank VITAS for the care they provided to my grandmother. We were especially grateful that they sent us Haitian nurses fluent in Creole, our native language. At first we didn’t know what to expect from hospice but the Haitian nurses made the situation much easier for my grandmother to be able to communicate in her own language when she needed something. We felt like they were part of our family. —Toussaint

Waterbury, Connecticut
We were blown away by the care our VITAS nurses gave to Mami. Mami was always comfortable and cared for. The doctors were helpful and the nurses and aides were very nice. The VITAS team was humble, compassionate and knowledgeable. The majority of the team spoke Spanish to Mami, and one of the nurses was from our country, which made us happy. Muchas gracias, VITAS. —Marta
Livingston, New Jersey
The rabbi was wonderful! We cannot thank VITAS enough for the wonderful care they provided to my dad. The nurses and doctors were attentive and we were extremely impressed by the rabbi, who really helped our family more than we can express. We are forever grateful. —Joshua

Riverside, California
In our culture, death isn’t really talked about and the idea of hospice care isn’t even explored. VITAS was referred to us by dear family friends who went through a similar situation. We were very pleased with them. We had no problems, and someone always answered our questions. The whole team was great and took exceptional care of my uncle. My uncle only spoke Mandarin and we were hesitant at first that we’d have a language barrier, but VITAS sent a care team that also spoke Mandarin. I would say it was too good to be true, given the circumstances. It was great that our nurses were Chinese because it made the family feel comfortable and understood. We are so thankful for your help, VITAS. —Ling
As a national company located in some of the country’s largest metropolitan areas, VITAS has experience in helping patients and families from every culture, every ethnicity and every walk of life. The diversity in both our patient populations and our labor force is unrivaled. We proactively reach out to every segment of a community’s population—African American, Asian American, Hispanic, Jewish, etc.—to ensure that everyone is aware of and understands what hospice care is and how it can benefit them at the most critical time in their lives. We also work very hard to educate and train our employees about our patients’ different belief systems, as well as about the cultural rituals and practices that might be unique to a segment of the community. We do this in the hopes of demonstrating our respect for people of different cultures and religions, especially at a time when they most deserve the utmost respect.

Barry M. Kinzbrunner
Executive Vice President and Chief Medical Officer

From caring for the sick to the mourning practices of those who are left behind, Judaism provides a profound way for its followers to mark the passing of a loved one, while still honoring life itself. VITAS’ certified Jewish Hospice programs train staff and volunteers in these beliefs and customs, along with Jewish ethics related to medical futility and the care of the terminally ill.

Nick Westfall
Senior Vice President of Field Operations

"As a national company located in some of the country’s largest metropolitan areas, VITAS has experience in helping patients and families from every culture, every ethnicity and every walk of life. The diversity in both our patient populations and our labor force is unrivaled. We proactively reach out to every segment of a community’s population—African American, Asian American, Hispanic, Jewish, etc.—to ensure that everyone is aware of and understands what hospice care is and how it can benefit them at the most critical time in their lives. We also work very hard to educate and train our employees about our patients’ different belief systems, as well as about the cultural rituals and practices that might be unique to a segment of the community. We do this in the hopes of demonstrating our respect for people of different cultures and religions, especially at a time when they most deserve the utmost respect."
VITAS Spiritual Care
Meeting patients and families where they are

Many psychological, spiritual and emotional components to end-of-life experiences can be very difficult for patients and their loved ones. For that reason, every VITAS hospice team includes a social worker and chaplain with extensive training and experience in psychosocial counseling, spiritual awareness, end-of-life issues and bereavement.

VITAS chaplains work with the patient’s physician and, if appropriate, religious advisor to ensure that the patient’s spiritual and emotional needs are being met. The chaplain provides pastoral care, including spiritual and bereavement counseling that is determined by the patient and is consistent with the family’s values, beliefs and religious preferences.

After a patient passes away, VITAS provides bereavement services, such as counseling, support groups and memorial services to the patient’s loved ones for 13 months after the death.

Orange County, California
We had a wonderful experience using VITAS. My mom’s condition was progressively getting worse, and she wanted to spend her last weeks at home rather than in a hospital. The social worker at UCLA Medical Center recommended VITAS.

Nurses worked around the clock in eight-hour shifts along with the caregivers we already had. At least once a day a doctor came, and all of my mom’s medical equipment and medications were delivered to my parents’ house. The nurses and doctors were very good at explaining what was going on, and they told us they would be able to give us warning when the final days were near. This was very helpful for my brother and I since we had to go out of town for a few days. Sure enough, when on a Friday the nurse said our
mother wouldn't make it through the weekend, she was right. But my mom was very comfortable and pain-free when she passed.

Now my dad is attending a grief support group hosted by VITAS, and it is really helping him. VITAS will help the family with anything they need for a whole year after the patient's death. We are all very pleased with our decision to use VITAS. I highly recommend them. —Amy

**Torrance, California**

Loved them! They give 24-hour care if needed and FedEx-ed all the meds to my doorstep overnight. Overall we were pleased with the nurses and doctors that saw my mother. One of the things that stands out the most is that after mentioning to our social worker that my mother was Buddhist, she was able to send us a Buddhist chaplain. My mother felt comfortable with the chaplain and I believe it truly enhanced her last days before she passed. Thank you, VITAS. —Hamayun

**Dallas, Texas**

Thank you for the gentle care that you provided my husband in his final days on Earth. Your help was invaluable. Not only did you make the process of dying easier for him, but for me as well. My husband was a pastor for over 40 years. You would think dying would be an easy process for him. This was not the case. VITAS offered both spiritual and moral support to my family. I would like to thank all of your staff. —Ruby

**Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

We weren’t really sure what to expect with hospice. However, we were pleasantly surprised with VITAS. Besides going above and beyond to care for my sister, they also cared for our family, explaining the process and helping us overcome our fears about losing our loved one. My sister passed away peacefully and comfortably. The rabbi was instrumental throughout this whole process. —Maureen
VITAS
Memory Bears
Offering a ‘bear hug’ when it’s needed the most

For children and adults who are dealing with the loss of a loved one, a VITAS Memory Bear can offer a sense of security and a soft, comforting remembrance during a time of grieving.

Memory Bears are created by VITAS volunteers—sewn with compassion and love—from clothing provided by the family of a deceased patient. Using a patient’s favorite shirt, sweater or other treasured article of clothing, volunteers create a small, stuffed bear to provide family members and friends with a visible, happy memory of their loved one.

Families fall in love with Memory Bears! The bears symbolize the loved one and provide an opportunity for happy reminiscences. Memory Bears give families permission to hold on to something of value and are “forever friends” who can ease a hurting heart. Adults love them, and hug them, as much as kids do.

Milwaukee, Wisconsin

To all the wonderful people at VITAS who cared for our mom during her last days with us, the support staff and volunteers who made the special Memory Bears, we extend our deepest gratitude. You have been an incredible source of support for us. You made mom very comfortable, allowed her to pass very peacefully in her familiar surroundings and were always there, and continue to be there, for our family. You have helped lift our heavy hearts and spirits in so many ways. Thank you for making a hard time easier. —Mom’s entire family
San Francisco, California
Dear Team, You always seem to amaze us. Thank you to all involved in having the 10 bears made for my grandchildren. I am so excited to hand them out to them. This team has been wonderful in every way. Thank you for all your support.
—Brenda

Miami, Florida
This letter is to show my deepest gratitude for the exemplary VITAS team that tended to my fiancé in his time of need. Our amazing doctor would visit and call every day to check up on him. She took the initiative to have a teddy bear made from his shirt for my children, knowing they would love to have something personal and tangible to remind them of his love for them. She is truly a special and terrific doctor. —Yoly

Atlanta, Georgia
I would like to send a big thank you to the VITAS team that cared for my father. I can’t imagine how we would have survived this devastating time without you guys, you are all angels! What truly broke my heart was watching my kids grieve for their grandpa. One of the volunteers that checked in on us had the idea of sewing a little bear for them using a special shirt they could remember him by. I found a pair of pajamas the kids had given my dad during Christmas that they had picked out themselves. When the volunteer gave my kids the teddy bear, they immediately smiled when they saw the pajamas. We will never forget you guys for helping us in so many ways. With a grateful heart. —Pam
VITAS Community Connection
Charity brings clarity

VITAS Community Connection (VCC) is a charitable organization whose mission is to provide financial assistance for VITAS patients and their families with special needs.

The VCC might help in covering the cost of a VITAS patient or family’s outstanding utility bill or rent, or it might grant money for groceries, warm clothes or to replace a broken appliance, such as a refrigerator. In some cases, the VCC grants money to help meet a VITAS patient’s last wish, to bring a touch of “specialness” to his/her life and to help elevate the quality of life at the end of life.

The VCC ensures that the money raised in a given community is used to help VITAS patients and families in that community, so donors know their money is being used for a good cause.

Stories about VCC helping VITAS patients

Palm Beach, Florida
It was a Friday afternoon. An 80-year-old VITAS patient was dying and wanted to see his daughter. His daughter wanted to see him, too, but she couldn’t afford an airline ticket from Albany, New York, on such short notice. The VCC team from Palm Beach looked up flights from New York, called the daughter to coordinate her travel to Palm Beach and paid for her airline tickets, making it possible for her to spend a few precious moments with her father. He passed shortly after seeing her.

Waterbury, Connecticut
A 38-year-old VITAS patient wanted to return to her native India to see her two young daughters before she died. Neither she nor her husband had enough money for airline tickets. Given her delicate condition, it was imperative for her husband to travel with her to assist her during the
long trip. The VCC team in Connecticut immediately stepped up and purchased two tickets for the couple. Upon giving the news to the patient, she shed tears of joy because she was so happy about seeing her children again—for the last time.

**Fairfield, Connecticut**

Due to financial hardship, a 31-year-old cancer patient with two children had to move into her mother and step-father’s home. The patient’s mother gave up her job to care for her daughter, leaving the family dependent on the step-father’s modest income to make ends meet. As a result of the family’s reduced income, some of the bills went unpaid. Overwhelmed with caring for her daughter and a growing number of unpaid bills, the patient’s mother’s health began to suffer, but she refused to ask for help. When the VITAS care team took notice that the family owed outstanding utility bills, they encouraged them to accept the VCC’s gesture of helping to ease the burden on the family. In the end, the patient’s mother felt a big relief and was deeply appreciative of the help.

**Riverside, California**

A 22-year-old VITAS patient with renal failure was being cared for by his mother. The mother missed a lot of work due to her son’s decline and increasing care needs. Her income suffered as a result. She fell behind on her gas and electric bill and was struggling to buy groceries. Upon learning of the mother’s financial struggle, the VITAS care team reached out to the VCC, which was able to greatly decrease the amounts owed to the gas and electric company, as well as get some money to buy groceries for a month. The family was very appreciative, and the patient died peacefully with his mother at his side.
VITAS—Where employees make a difference
Answering a ‘call’ and finding a purpose in their life and work

As the nation’s leading provider of end-of-life care, VITAS hires the best and brightest from their specialized fields to join its interdisciplinary teams. Many of our staff find it uplifting to work with patients and families who truly need their assistance. Surveys reveal that employees join VITAS because they find the work very rewarding, they have a strong interest in hospice, they enjoy the opportunity to spend quality time with patients and families and they value VITAS’ strong reputation.

Maximizing quality of life—for patients and for employees—is at the heart of the VITAS mission. Providing comprehensive benefits options to our employees is important to their quality of life. VITAS fosters a culture of appreciation and recognition for its employees and values their dedication and commitment.

Employee surveys show the top reasons employees choose to stay at VITAS:
• Enjoyable working environments
• Positive relationships with managers and colleagues
• Opportunities for professional growth
• Opportunity to work in a team environment

Houston, Texas
One of the things I enjoy most about my job as a community liaison is the fact that I have a great task at hand—to educate our traditionally underserved communities about hospice. VITAS truly understands the importance of reaching out to all members of our communities to ensure they are aware of and understand how to access quality hospice service. This is important because many people don’t know what hospice is, and if they do, they think it will be too expensive or that they don’t want to leave their home. Through my relationships with different community groups, I teach them that hospice is a Medicare benefit and that hospice comes to the patient’s house, wherever they may reside. When I meet with families they are surprised to learn this, many of them tell me they wish they had known this information sooner. That is why I love my job, because I am constantly making a difference in people’s ability to choose better options in their end-of-life care. —Tammy
Kal Mistry  
Senior Vice President and Chief Administrative Officer

“...At VITAS, we hire and train the best healthcare professionals. All of our employees, and especially our clinicians, understand the magnitude of their mission—to bring the highest quality of care at a time when life is most precious. Many of our employees have been with VITAS for many years, which shows how much they love their work and how much they care about our patients and families, which contributes to our scope of experience and depth of knowledge as the nation’s leading provider of hospice care. It is often said that it takes a special kind of person to work in hospice care, and this is absolutely true. And at VITAS, we attract and retain those very special people. We are grateful to our employees for choosing VITAS as their home, where they bring their unique gifts of care and compassion for people at the end of life.”

Miami, Florida
I’ve been a receptionist for more than 15 years at VITAS. Although I don’t visit patients and their families like my field colleagues do, I believe I contribute a great deal to fulfilling our company’s mission of “Patients and families come first.” For example, I field calls throughout the day to our different departments, I take calls from people who ask for information about the company, and I help the office with anything else they need. What I enjoy about working at my program is that I am surrounded by people who are dedicated to providing the highest-quality care to our patients and their families at the end of life. Their work is inspiring to me and it makes me want to give my best every day. —Lauren
Naples, Florida
When I joined VITAS six years ago, I started as a licensed practical nurse (LPN). At that time, I was studying toward my RN degree and I was able to apply to VITAS’ tuition reimbursement program that helped me pay for my tuition. I eventually graduated and became an RN. VITAS’ support toward my education has allowed me to rise through the ranks to my current position as a team manager. —Lydia

Sacramento, California
A typical day for me, as a home health aide, is to visit patients, help bathe them, help prepare some meals and perhaps help tidy up around their house. Many patients live alone and they have family members that live far away. That is why I truly enjoy visiting my patients and providing them with the care that I would give to my own family members. When my patients tell me they love me, I know I am doing right by them. —Martin

Shrewsbury, New Jersey
I’ve been a chaplain with VITAS for 18 years. A hospice chaplain provides patients with spiritual support—whatever the patient’s faith may be—and provides them with compassionate listening in their last precious days of life. What I love about being a hospice chaplain is that we are making a difference in people’s lives. We comfort them when they’re hurting and we comfort them when they’re scared. Sometimes we are able to help families reconcile and come together before a patient passes, which helps them find peace at the end of life. —Mark
Dallas, Texas
I never thought I would have a career in hospice until I experienced hospice with my own mother. I will never forget the young woman who helped our family deal with some of the paperwork that was required during this time and yet, her strong and comforting presence helped us a great deal. As a social worker, I learned more about hospice, and I knew I wanted to give back to others who were going through a similar journey, and that’s when I joined VITAS. I love that VITAS’ culture motivates employees to do their best every day, and do even better tomorrow. —Susan

Hartford, Connecticut
My mission as a hospice nurse is to give people the chance to say goodbye to their loved ones. This mission is personal to me because two years ago, I lost my father. I was deeply grateful to have had a chance to spend the last moments of my father’s life by his side and say goodbye to him. Now, as a hospice nurse, I appreciate the opportunity to help families say goodbye while building moments they will cherish forever. —Linda

San Diego, California
Embarking on the journey of caring for patients at the end of life is the reason why I pursued a career in medicine. I am proud to be a hospice physician at VITAS. Many times, families tell me they cannot imagine going through this difficult time without our support. I find great joy in knowing that I am making a meaningful, positive impact on patients and their family members at such an important moment of their lives. —Katherine
What the medical community says about VITAS

VITAS has remained the nation’s leading provider of end-of-life care not only by providing patients and their families with the best in pain and symptom management, comfort, compassion and bereavement support, but also by working closely with the physicians, hospitals, assisted living and long term care facilities, nursing homes, senior centers and other medical- and healthcare-related centers and organizations in its many communities across the country.

From managing dedicated inpatient hospice units in local hospitals to sponsoring hospice and palliative care medical fellowships, and from providing support at a local cancer walk-a-thon to providing the food and beverages at a local nursing home’s Veterans’ Day picnic, we work with our partners in a variety of ways to show our support for the citizens in our communities.

VITAS’ care doesn’t stop when a patient passes away. VITAS’ care continues through community education and outreach, through corporate sponsorships and through its close community alliances.

Richard Rossell, Director, Business Management, Comfort Keepers Home Health

As a long term resident and healthcare professional of Brevard County, it is with pleasure that I write to commend the staff and services of VITAS. On several occasions I have referred personal friends to VITAS, and in every case I was told of their great appreciation of the services they received.

Professionally I have had the opportunity to also be a referral source for individuals requiring hospice services. As an example, I received a frantic phone call from a caregiver stating that her husband was being discharged from the hospital the next day, and she was informed that there were no available beds in facilities for him. I called my contact at VITAS and within an hour a VITAS Community Liaison went to the hospital and assisted the family with placement immediately. That family will always be grateful for the help they received from VITAS. I will continue to be a professional referral source and happily support the efforts of the VITAS staff.
VITAS’ growth and success is due in large part to the partnerships that it has formed with its ‘referral sources,’ or the physicians, hospitals and medical and healthcare-related facilities that refer their patients and residents to hospice care. Our referral sources depend on us to be innovators in the hospice care field, so they can rest assured that their patients are in good hands. This means constantly assessing and enhancing our business processes and procedures so we are working as quickly and efficiently as possible, and it means staying on the cutting edge of technological developments in healthcare. Testimonials such as these show that VITAS is truly making ‘connections’ in its communities, not only with patients and families but with physicians, hospitals and other healthcare facilities. Those connections are crucial to our company’s growth and success. VITAS couldn’t be the hospice care leader that it is without its community partners, but I like to think that maybe our communities have, in turn, grown—especially in terms of the quality of their medical care—because of VITAS’ presence.
Michelle Miller, Health and Wellness Director, Brookdale Senior Living Solutions

My company has worked with VITAS for over a year now. I have never seen our residents treated with such compassion. I have seen other hospice companies as well, have worked with at least four others in my career, and none of them compare to VITAS.

When VITAS takes care of my residents, I am comforted because I KNOW that no matter what happens, the resident and their families will be well taken care of. The VITAS nurse in the building works side by side with my nurses, keeping our teams informed—they are truly part of our team. They are the helping hand that ensures that when residents and families most need it, they will have the best care possible—NO MATTER WHAT.

VITAS cares for families after the residents have passed. I called them to come visit a wife whose husband had passed weeks before, because she wasn’t doing well. VITAS was by her side to help her adjust.

I know, without a shadow of a doubt, that if I or my family ever needs hospice, VITAS will be on my speed dial!

Ron Fried
Executive Vice President of Development & Public Affairs

“VITAS believes that everyone should know about their choices regarding end-of-life care and have access to the highest quality hospice and palliative care available, should they choose that form of support. VITAS is a leading advocate for patients’ and families’ rights and works hard to educate its communities about hospice and palliative care and the many benefits of its services. We meet regularly with state and federal policy makers about end-of-life care. We often invite legislators to visit patients and families in their homes, so those who are making laws can see firsthand how hospice and palliative care work. Many patients and family members tell us that these meetings make them feel as though they have an impact on the future of hospice care … and they do.”
Joan Hinkson Ragoonan, Director, North Shore Medical Center
It is with distinct pleasure that I take the time to thank VITAS Healthcare for its exceptional relationship with North Shore Medical Center. The response time to our referrals is superb. As Director of the Case Management Department, it is of utmost importance for us to have all referrals responded to in a timely manner and to ensure the continuum of care for our patients with a trustworthy company. Having a VITAS hospice inpatient unit on the grounds of the hospital helps us to ensure a smooth transition for our patients, funded or non-funded, when hospice care is needed. The professionalism demonstrated by the VITAS team is admirable. We can always count on them to help us meet the continuing educational needs of the hospital.

Dr. Aldo Ray Montes, Medical Director, MCCI
I choose to refer my patients to VITAS because the quality of the care provided is excellent. They are very timely and quickly responsive. They treat both the patient and family members/caregivers with comfort measures and support, while taking the time to determine their needs. The team’s responsiveness to changing needs or emergencies is always very good—very strong, including after hours. Their interdisciplinary care team is always very caring and compassionate—outstanding. The team is always willing to do whatever it takes. Hospice is a very good program—especially at VITAS.
Ela Lena, Chief Operating Officer, Florida Medical Center
Florida Medical Center has partnered with VITAS for more than 15 years. VITAS opened the hospice inpatient unit at our facility in 1998. Having a dedicated unit in our hospital provides a seamless transition for patients from acute care to hospice care when curative care is no longer an option and when pain and symptom management is required. The hospice unit assures patients receive the highest-quality end-of-life care available. VITAS’ dedicated staff provides the specialized clinical care and psychosocial support needed by patients and families during this most difficult time. The hospice teams are experts in pain management and making patients as comfortable as possible. VITAS has become an integral part of our hospital. There are countless advantages to partnering with VITAS to create a unit for quality, compassionate end-of-life care.

Don Kramer, CEO, One Senior Place
Over the years, I have had extensive interaction with the VITAS team in both professional and community service contexts. Their presence in Central Florida has been a model of professionalism, educational outreach, community involvement and good business sense.

I have seen how the benefits of their success accrue directly to their patients in the form of excellent service, and our Care Managers report high levels of customer satisfaction among our clients who use VITAS. At the same time, VITAS’ strength has generated a ripple effect that has challenged and lifted other area hospice providers to higher levels of professionalism and service, positively impacting the care provided by all area hospices by raising the competitive bar.

VITAS’ community-based and charitable initiatives are legendary, and the list is long. Some that we have seen in action (and in many cases, supported) include volunteer recruitment and appreciation events, veterans outreach initiatives and partnerships with other groups such as Honor Flight and many others. The strength of both their business and charitable operations enable VITAS to keep their promise to provide end-of-life care to all, regardless of ability to pay.
Michele Morgan, Director Sales and Admissions, Seaside Manor Assisted Living and Memory Care

It is with pleasure and gratitude that I share comments on my experience with every VITAS representative that has been of service to our residents at Seaside Manor. While we have many facets of healthcare present in our building, VITAS strives and achieves the highest level of excellence.

VITAS’ efforts are outstanding throughout each care-giving phase. They are innovative in achieving comfort levels for the residents. All of these tasks, whether business-related or interpersonal, are accomplished with a noticeable degree of competence, humility, integrity and grace. Thus, we highly recommend VITAS for our residents.
As a palliative medicine physician who’s practiced in the field of hospice and palliative medicine since 2005, I have worked at some of the largest, busiest and most successful academic medical institutions, along with the largest non-profit healthcare system in the United States.

Of the scores of hospices that I have interacted with, none have been of equal quality or produced the right resources for my patients the way VITAS has. During my tenure at the University of Miami Miller School of Medicine, VITAS went to great lengths with our field to serve our complicated, and often marginalized, patient population.

They renovated a gorgeous, state-of-the-art, inpatient unit at the University of Miami Hospital that caters to the sickest patients in the hospital. This unit supported all of the procedures needed to deal with highly distressing illnesses, provided medications that were too complex and required intensive monitoring such that nowhere else (within the hospital or without) could deliver these to our patients, and hired specialty nurses that consistently delivered top-tier care by not only fulfilling their nursing duties but generously sharing themselves and allowing the human interaction to blossom at the most critical time of a patient’s life.

VITAS also supported and funded the creation of a hospice and palliative medicine fellowship. This not only helped to create more palliative medicine professionals but served as a signal to VITAS’ commitment to education of the faculty, staff, and community, as the fellows had responsibilities to pass on what they had learned to those around them.

It is without reservation that I would recommend a friend or family member enroll with VITAS for hospice.
Marilyn Torrecillas, Case Management Processor, Molina Healthcare of Florida

I would like to express my satisfaction with VITAS. I used to work for the Case Management Department at Medica Healthcare, a healthcare provider in South Florida, where I first met a VITAS representative. It was then that I shared with her my personal experience of dealing with my very ill spouse. After long consideration, I called on VITAS when my husband’s illness took a turn for the worse. It was a devastating situation, as he was only 46 years old and we had two girls, 8 and 10 years old. Upon calling VITAS, they immediately went to my house to assess my husband, and the following morning they started the service. A few days later, when my husband’s health began steadily deteriorating, VITAS admitted him to an inpatient unit, where they gave him comfort and peace. My husband died that same day.

VITAS also helped us after our loss with bereavement support, even offering special support for my grieving children. This made my children and I understand this difficult stage in their lives and made the grieving process a little easier. We learned how to accept and live with our loss. My family and I appreciate the palliative care VITAS provided to my husband and the great emotional support they always gave us. Today, as a Case Management Processor, I have the opportunity to advise our patients and families with similar situations about VITAS. Thank you for everything. God bless you.
VITAS: A Proud Tradition of Leadership in Hospice and Palliative Care

VITAS Healthcare is proud to be the nation’s leading provider of hospice and palliative care services. Having started in Miami, Florida, in 1978, VITAS became, in 2004, a wholly owned subsidiary of Chemed Corporation, which is publicly traded on the New York Stock Exchange (NYSE:CHE) and is headquartered in Cincinnati, Ohio. Under Chemed’s leadership, VITAS has more than doubled in size and has provided its high-quality care for more than a million patients and their families.

Our healthcare communities and our patients and families choose VITAS for numerous reasons, including:

• VITAS has set the national standards for hospice and palliative care and serves patients across the life-limiting disease spectrum, including but not limited to: cancer, stroke, dementia, AIDS, Alzheimer’s, heart, lung, liver and kidney disease, and much more.

• Chemed and VITAS have invested significantly in setting up controls, systems and procedures for upholding and maintaining the highest industry standards in compliance and regulatory requirements.

• VITAS’ superior quality of hospice care is validated regularly in patient/family surveys, which consistently show a greater than 95-percent satisfaction rating.

For more information, visit www.vitas.com.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VITAS Healthcare would like to thank all the patients and families featured in this book for sharing their personal stories in their end-of-life journey with us. We would also like to thank the members of the healthcare community who graciously provided testimonials about their professional experiences with VITAS. Additionally, we’d like to thank our dedicated employees who put our patients and families first every day and make VITAS the nation’s leading provider of hospice care.

VITAS acknowledges the Corporate Communications Department for producing this book and the Corporate Marketing Department for the art and design of the book.