

# Hospice Care

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**H**ospice care is appropriate when the goal of an individual with a terminal illness has shifted from cure or life-prolonging treatment to care aimed at relieving pain and controlling symptoms and supporting an individual and family through the dying process. Most hospices accept patients who have a life expectancy of six months or less if their disease runs its normal course (the requirement for Medicare reimbursement). Hospice care is provided by a team that includes physicians, nurses, social workers, chaplains, pharmacists, home health aides, and volunteers. Support is provided to the patient's loved ones as well. This care can be given in a person's home, in a nursing home, or in a residential care center.

Hospice services continue to be underutilized, with many eligible individuals never using hospice care and others electing it only in their final days or weeks of life. At least some of this underutilization is the result of misunderstandings about hospice care. Some people believe it is only for individuals who have cancer or AIDS, and others assume it is appropriate only when death is imminent. In fact, hospice is often appropriate for individuals who have conditions such as COPD, heart failure, stroke, advanced liver disease, end-stage kidney disease, or dementia.



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