

Care provision at the end of life

Written by

Erin Howe

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Sometimes the most difficult discussions to have with your family members turn out to be the most important ones for their quality of life. Death and dying can be highly emotional and controversial topics to talk about, but broaching these issues while loved ones are healthy and cognitively intact is essential.

Most people are familiar with advance directives such as a health care proxy — a trusted person you appoint to make decisions for you should you be unable to do so for yourself — or a living will, which states your health care preferences. But often families are unaware or unfamiliar with services available as their family members near the end of life. Whether the critically ill person is still at home, admitted to the hospital or in the nursing home, hospice is an option for providing comfort measures to support the patient and family through this challenging time.

Most long-term care facilities offer hospice as a service in which your family member receives an additional aide, nurse and social worker to supplement the care currently provided to ease suffering, provide companionship and generally give support in a fashion individualized to the

needs of the resident and family. In order for hospice services to be administered, a referral by a care provider is the first step. Families may also request this referral.

The hospice team will then meet with the family, review the chart and speak with the medical team to determine if the resident qualifies. This entails a person having a terminal diagnosis with usually less than six months to live who has made a decision to pursue no further curative treatment modalities.

Hospice, at times, has been perceived in a negative manner related to hastening death; in actuality, hospice care is about giving patients the freedom and choice to guide their care as death approaches.

As caregivers of those at the end of life, we strive to bring peace and comfort as our residents transition in their own way and their own time toward an end that is hopefully as dignified as the life they have always lived.

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Howe is an adult nurse practitioner at the Jewish Home of Rochester.

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