

What is hospice care?

Hospice care is considered to be the model for quality, compassionate care for people facing a life-limiting illness or injury. Hospice and palliative care involves a team-oriented approach to provide comfort, expert medical care, pain management, and emotional and spiritual support tailored to each patient's needs and wishes. Support is provided to a patient's loved ones as well. At the center of the philosophy of hospice care is the belief that each of us has the right to be pain-free and to live and die with dignity, and that our families are integral to providing support to allow us to do so.

Hospice focuses on comfort, not curing, and in most cases, care is provided in the patient's place of residence. Most care is provided in homes, but we also provide care in skilled nursing facilities, assisted living facilities, hospitals and any place you would call "home." Pathways Hospice services are available to patients of any age, religion, race, or illness.

How does hospice care work?

Typically, a family member serves as the primary caregiver and, when appropriate, helps make decisions for the terminally ill individual. In addition to regular care visits, hospice staff makes visits to assess patient's well being and provides other care or services as needed. Pathways Hospice staff is on-call 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

The hospice team develops a care plan that meets each patient's individual needs for pain management and symptom control.

The Pathways Hospice care team

- Patient's personal physician
- Hospice physician (or medical director)
- Nurses
- Home health aides
- Social workers / counselors
- Chaplains
- Music therapists
- Trained volunteers
- Speech, physical, and occupational therapists, as needed

What services are provided?

Through the interdisciplinary care team listed above, Pathways Hospice:

- Manages the patient's pain and symptoms.
- Assists the patient with the emotional, social and spiritual aspects of dying.
- Provides needed drugs, medical supplies, and equipment related to the hospice diagnosis.
- Supports the family on how to care for the patient.
- Delivers special services like speech, physical and music therapy.
- Makes short-term inpatient care available when pain or symptoms become too difficult to manage at home or when caregivers need respite time.
- Provides bereavement care and counseling to family and friends.

What is Grief?

Grief is a normal response to loss that can turn a person's world upside down. Emotions, thought processes, behaviors, and physical well-being are all impacted by grief. Most people who suffer a loss experience one or more of the following:

- Anger
- Guilt
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Fatigue
- Confusion
- Inability to concentrate
- Change in appetite
- Sleep disturbances
- Physical complaints
- Sudden mood swings
- Lack of energy

Grief counseling helps people through difficult times of bereavement and transition.

What are some questions that you should ask when looking for a hospice program?

Hospice care is a philosophy of care that accepts dying as a natural part of life. When death is inevitable, hospice seeks neither to hasten nor postpone it. Both who you choose to provide that care and the types of care you request remain very important questions.

We recommend you consider these questions when looking for a hospice program:

- Is this a Medicare/Medicaid certified provider?
- What services are provided?
- What kind of support is available to the family/caregiver?
- Does this program allow my personal physician to remain involved in hospice care?
- What do hospice volunteers at your organization do?
- How will you work to keep the patient comfortable?
- How and what services are provided after hours?
- How and where does hospice provide short-term inpatient care?
- Do you have a contract with the long-term care facility that I might choose?

How can you afford hospice care? Who pays for it?

More than 80 percent of people who use hospice care are over the age of 65. This means they are covered by Medicare Part A and thus entitled to the services offered by the Medicare Hospice Benefit. This benefit covers virtually all aspects of hospice care. The regular Medicare benefits still apply for all care not directly connected to the hospice diagnosis. As a result, the financial burdens usually associated with caring for a terminally ill patient are virtually nonexistent. In addition, most private health plans and Medicaid in 45 states and the District of Columbia cover hospice services. Medicare and Medicaid have hospice benefits that pay for comprehensive hospice care without a deductible or co-insurance. Private health plans vary widely in their coverage.

As a non-profit agency serving Larimer and western Weld counties, Pathways Hospice works in each situation to ensure our patients receive the care they need. Our business office staff works with insurers to minimize the time and energy the family needs to devote to money issues.

Where does hospice care take place?

The majority of hospice patients are cared for in their own homes or the homes of a loved one. "Home" is defined as a patient's residence, whether that is a private home, an assisted living facility or a nursing home. If patient needs require, Pathways Hospice offers inpatient care at the Hospice Care Center at McKee Medical Center in Loveland.

How does hospice serve patients and families?

Hospice care is a patient- and family-centered approach that includes, at a minimum, a team of doctors, nurses, social workers, counselors, chaplains and trained volunteers. The team works collaboratively, focusing on patient needs, whether those needs are physical, psychological or spiritual. The team goal is to help keep the patient as comfortable as possible, with loved ones nearby.

Medicare and other hospice care recipients may receive these benefits:

- Physician services for the medical direction of the patient's care.
- Regular home visits by registered nurses.
- Certified nurse's aides for personal care services such as dressing and bathing.
- Social work and counseling.
- Spiritual support through hospice chaplains or other clergy.
- Medical equipment such as hospital beds, wheel chairs and walkers.
- Medical supplies such as incontinence and wound care supplies.
- Drugs for symptom control and pain relief.
- Volunteer support to assist patients and loved ones.
- Physical therapy, speech therapy, occupational therapy and dietary counseling.

What role do volunteers play in hospice care?

Pathways Hospice has trained volunteers to aid families and patients. Volunteers provide companionship and support for patients and brief breaks for caregivers. Many volunteers offer their professional services such as massage therapy, financial services, beauty care, energy work and photography. Perhaps the most important skill, however, is their ability to be good listeners.

Who qualifies for hospice care?

Hospice care is for any person with an advanced medical condition and a life expectancy of six months or less if the illness runs its normal course. Although in its first years hospice care served primarily cancer patients, today all life-threatening illnesses and conditions are included in hospice care.