

Not all hospice providers care the same for patients

To the editor:

Reporter-Herald readers may have seen an article on the growth of hospice care and rising costs for Medicare.

This article points out that hospice has changed dramatically from its community-based, nonprofit beginnings to now include profit-seeking businesses. From 2000 to 2009, the number of hospices in the country increased by 50 percent. Of that growth, 93 percent is attributed to for-profit providers.

The for-profit orientation has greatly impacted the costs of hospice for Medicare and the way Medicare views hospice. The average for-profit patient cost to Medicare is \$12,609; 29 percent more than the costs to care for a patient by a nonprofit. This is typically attributed to for-profit providers seeking patients who live longer and have less costly needs.

Selecting a medical provider for a loved one is an important decision and hospice is no exception. It is important to ask meaningful questions about care options:

- How experienced are the professionals?
- How does a hospice know they are meeting patient and family needs?
- Who is directing the care and what are the qualifications of the director?
- How is hospice paid for and what if it is not covered by Medicare or insurance?
- What level of grief support will be provided for family members?

Through the expertise and compassion of an interdisciplinary team (including a hospice physician, registered nurse, certified nursing aide, social worker, chaplain, and grief counselor) — hospice helps patients and families strengthen relationships to complete and celebrate life.

In many instances hospice is actually shown to improve quality of life for patients and their family (Journal of Clinical Oncology). A little known fact is that hospice care actually prolongs life for patients with certain diseases by as much as 29 days (Journal of Pain and Symptom Management).

It is more important than ever to know about your options to be prepared for one of the most challenging and meaningful times in life.

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