

What Is Hospice?

What is hospice? Hospice is a special government-supported health care program that was created more than 30 years ago to provide expert care and services for people with serious illnesses, most of whom are living at home or in a nursing home.

For patients who are insured by Medicaid or Medicare, it is considered a cost-free benefit that can be obtained by patients who are eligible. A doctor must determine whether a patient is eligible for hospice, and if the patient is eligible and can be cared for by the hospice, the patient (or the family if the patient is not able) must sign up for the benefit.

What Are Hospice Services?

The hospice benefit includes support and services from a team of professionals and volunteers who are experts in providing care to patients with advanced illness. Care is provided wherever the patient is. Although most patients remain at home or in the nursing home, hospice offers access to inpatient care at a hospital or hospice residence when extra help is needed to bring symptoms under control.

Patients will receive visits from a nurse, social worker and chaplain, as well as other members of the hospice team. The hospice doctor may visit and will also work with the patient's own doctor.

The hospice team may include:

- Hospice Doctor
- Nurse
- Social Worker
- Chaplain
- Home Health Aide
- Volunteers
- Creative Arts Therapist
- Physical or Occupational Therapists
- Bereavement Counselor
- Speech Therapist
- Nutritionist

In addition to medicines to help the patient with symptoms such as pain, many other treatments and services are available through hospice. These include counseling, and physical and speech therapies. Home health aides may be available to help with activities of daily living, including bathing, dressing and meal preparation. Trained hospice volunteers can provide more assistance.

The needs of those who are seriously ill may change by the day or even the hour. Hospice professional staff are on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to oversee whatever care is needed.

The hospice benefit also pays the cost of all drugs, supplies and equipment related to the patient's terminal illness. If the patient needs blood tests or X-rays, these are also covered.

There is never a fee, a deductible or a co-pay for a service provided by hospice.

Who is Eligible for Hospice?

Many people are frightened when they hear the word hospice because they believe that hospice means that a person is dying. With good information, the patient and family should not have this fear.

The hospice benefit can be offered to patients and families if a physician determines that the patient is medically eligible and the hospice staff determines that hospice can meet the needs of the patient. To be medically eligible, a doctor needs to find that the patient has a terminal illness in an advanced stage. Although many people think that hospice can only provide care for up to six months, this is not true. If the doctor evaluates the patient and the patient is eligible for hospice services, care can continue for longer.

How Do I Find Out Whether I Can Get Hospice Services for Myself or a Family Member?

If you're interested in obtaining hospice care for yourself, a family member, or a friend, ask your doctor or the doctor of your family member or friend about hospice eligibility and care options.

Hospice Contact Information:

The following contact information is for hospice care in the Brooklyn area.

MJHS Hospice and Palliative Care	212-420-3370
VNSNY Hospice and Palliative Care	212-609-1920
Calvary Hospital Hospice	718-518-2465
Hospice of New York	718-472-1999
Compassionate Care Hospice	718-601-6694

Patient Education Series

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If you would like help in connecting with resources, talk to the doctor, nurse or social worker at your health center.