

South Florida Hospital News[®] and HEALTHCARE REPORT

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HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE IN SOUTH FLORIDA

Making the Transition to Hospice Care

For many years, death has been a distant and frightening event. While most still fear death, this philosophy is changing as more patients, and their families are sharing the death experience in the comfort of the same home where they have shared their living experiences. The primary goal of hospice is to provide personalized expert medical care, pain management, and emotional and spiritual support so that the patient may live comfortably and with dignity. Additionally, it is important the family and friends be with them in their final moments.

Why would you choose hospice care for yourself or a loved one?

We have found that many people dread hospice care. Our fieldwork has shown, lack of education and knowledge of palliative and hospice care to be a contributing factor to the anxiety and fear associated with the word hospice and what it will mean to the patient and their loved ones'. Some say that it feels like a defeat, whether it's by an illness or by life itself. Others say there's a feeling of helplessness and loss of control associated with hospice care.

The truth is, the end-of-life stage is never easy, and it is different for everyone. Admitting a patient to hospice does not mean giving up hope, it gives the patient and family an opportunity to cherish the patient's final moments comfortably with dignity. Hospice care focuses on caring, not curing. It provides symptom management and appropriate palliative care when curative medical treatments no longer enhance the patient's quality of life. The focus of care shifts towards helping the patient achieve maximum quality of life from a physical, emotional and spiritual perspective.

Together with the family the hospice interdisciplinary team consisting of physicians, nurses, social workers, chaplains, bereavement counselors, respite care volunteers and others; a plan is set in place to treat the individual needs of the patients'. These heroic caregivers play a central role in the hospice care program.

One, in fact, is defeating the pain by treating it and also overcoming the helplessness by disclosing his or her last rights. Social Services personnel are available to assist when requested, through the process of completing advanced directives. There is a sense of control when choosing hospice under these circumstances



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because one decides how they want the last few months of his or her life to look.

The hospice program not only focuses on the patient but their family and friends. Loved ones will not be left without the patient's last wishes and without a helping hand once the patient passes away. A crucial part of our program teaches and assists families; in order to meet the physical and emotional needs that accompany this time in their lives. Social services, spiritual counselors, and bereavement support staff provide unremitting care and education before, during and after hospice care is needed. OpusCare of South Florida vows to stay close to loved ones for at least a year after the patient's passing to help them cope with the loss.

There are ways to determine when a person is ready for hospice care. While the end-of-life stage is different for everyone, each family's customs and beliefs are unique, and each terminal illness is dissimilar, below are five signs OpusCare believes are an indication that hospice care is right for your situation.

1. **Terminal Illness:** the patient is fighting an aggressive disease.
2. **Aggressive Treatment:** the patient is not responding to aggressive treatment for a disease—whether it is chemotherapy or radiation, for example. Quality of life is quickly decompensating.
3. **Old age:** the patient has aged to the point where they are in and out of the hospital and continuously calling 911 to go to the ER.
4. **Need of comfort:** the patient wants to be in the comfort of their home with their family and friends during this stage.
5. **Helplessness:** the patient and/ or caregiver don't know where to go or what to do, knowing life's final moments are near.

Agreeing to hospice care is not admitting defeat. It is, in fact, a noble and selfless decision made to help the weak live the fullest lives they can. It allows for one to feel comfortable and be taken care of at a time when his or her body is slowly letting go.

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For more information, call 305-591-1606 or go to www.opuscare.org.