

Choosing a Hospice

There may be one hospice organization, or several that serve your community. It is important to find out about the services that each hospice offers. If there are several hospices that serve your area, you may want to request services from a particular hospice and can communicate that wish to your physician.

- Are all hospices the same?
- How do I decide if hospice is the appropriate care choice for me?
- How do I choose among different hospice programs?
- If there is only one hospice program in my community, how do I determine if it is a good one?

These are common questions for individuals and loved ones facing life-limiting illnesses. Determining if a hospice is right for you may best be learned from calling different hospices and asking them about their services. You can also talk to people you trust who work in healthcare or aging services or who have received support from a hospice.

- Physicians, nurses, and other healthcare professionals
- Social workers, clergy, and other counselors
- Friends or neighbors who have had direct experience with hospice care
- Call National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization's HelpLine 800.568.8898.

Questions to Ask When Choosing a Hospice Program

CaringInfo created a worksheet to help you through selecting the best hospice for you and your family. Use this form (Choosing a Quality Hospice for You or Your Loved Ones) and write notes when you contact a local hospice.

Below is a list of questions you should consider when looking for a hospice program.

- What services are provided?
- What kind of support is available to the family/caregiver?
- What roles do the attending physician and hospice play?
- What does the hospice volunteer do?
- How does hospice work to keep the patient comfortable?
- How are services provided after hours?
- How and where does hospice provide short-term inpatient care?
- With which nursing homes or long-term care facilities does the hospice work?
- How long does it typically take the hospice to enroll someone once the request for services is made?

Get to know end-of-life care services in your community by visiting NHPCO's "Find a Provider" tool online.

Nursing Home Room and Board

Room and board aren't covered by Medicare. You may receive hospice services wherever you live, even in a nursing home, however, the Medicare Hospice Benefit does not pay for nursing home room and board. If you are eligible for Medicaid, Medicaid will cover room and board charges.

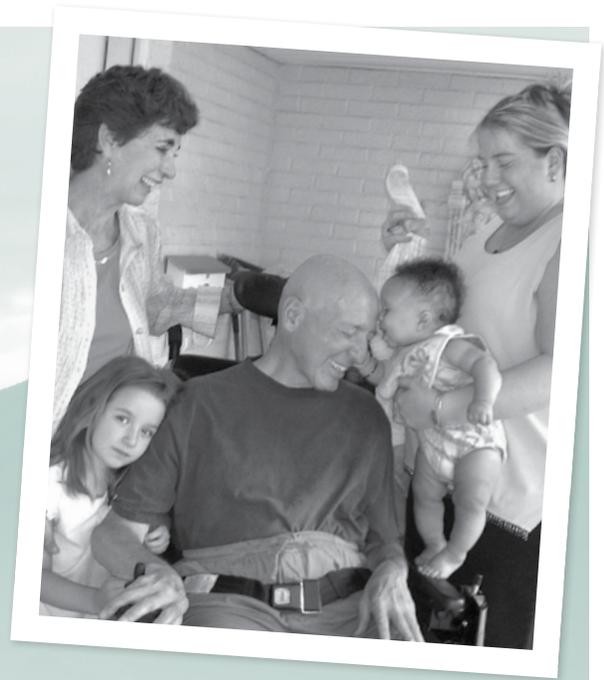
Hourly Care

Hospice care provided by the hospice team in the home is intermittent or visit based. You will receive visits by the hospice team based on you and your family's needs. Hourly care is not covered under the Medicare Hospice Benefit and if this is a necessity, you will need to pay out of pocket for this care or explore another care environment such as a nursing home which offers 24/7 care.

Choosing a Quality Hospice for You or Your Loved Ones

Depending on where you live there could be one or several hospice organizations serving your community. If there are multiple hospices in your area, you can decide which hospice you want to care for you or your loved one and let your physician know which one you prefer.

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization has developed some questions to help you identify factors that may be important to you and your family when selecting a hospice.



Questions

Notes

Is the Hospice Medicare Certified?

Most hospices are certified by Medicare and are therefore required to follow Medicare rules and regulations. This is important if wish to receive hospice care as part of your Medicare/Medicaid coverage.

Has the hospice been surveyed by a state or federal oversight agency in the last five years?

Ask when the last survey was and if any deficiencies were noted and if so, have they been resolved.

Is the organization a NHPCO member and does it comply with all aspects of NHPCO's Standards for Hospice Programs?

Ask if the hospice is a current NHPCO member, if it complies with NHPCO's Standards and has completed the Standards Self Assessment, and if so, how recently they completed it.

Is the hospice accredited by a national organization?

Several organizations accredit hospices, surveying them to ensure they meet quality standards. Hospices are not required to be accredited but accreditation can be a reflection of its commitment to quality.

Does the hospice conduct a family evaluation survey?

Many hospices ask family members to complete a brief evaluation of their services after the death of a loved one. Ask for their most recent scores so you can see how previous patients and family members have rated their services.

Does the hospice own or operate a care facility to provide home-like care in a hospice residence, hospital or nursing home?

This may be important to you if the care needed is complex and/or family caregivers cannot care for the person at home.

Are clinical staff (physicians, nurses, social workers) certified or credentialed in hospice and palliative care?

There are several credentials that hospice professionals can achieve based on their knowledge of hospice/palliative care and their educational experience.

What services do volunteers offer, and if requested, how quickly will a volunteer be available?

Volunteers can provide a variety of services including friendly visits, light household chores, running errands, personal care, etc. If you want a hospice volunteer, be sure to ask how quickly one can be assigned and how they match volunteers to meet your needs.

Will staff come to the home if there is a crisis at any time of the day or night and on weekends? Who is available to make the home visit (nurses, doctors, social workers, chaplains)?

Hospice staff are available by phone to help you 24 hours a day, seven days a week. However, some hospices offer limited in-home support on nights and weekends, while others are able to send staff out to a patient's home no matter when a crisis arises. Frequently a nurse is the best person to make a visit if it is a medical crisis, however, sometimes the crisis is best handled by a physician, social worker, chaplain or another member of the team. Ask if all members of the team are available in a crisis situation during nights and weekends.

If I need to go to a hospital or nursing home which ones does/doesn't the hospice work with?

If you have a preferred hospital or know that you may need to go to a nursing home, it's important to find out which ones the hospice has contracts with so they can continue to provide your hospice services in this different setting.

What "extra" services does the hospice offer?

All hospices provide expert medical care, emotional and spiritual care, medicines, medical supplies and equipment, volunteers and grief support after the death of a loved one. In addition to these services some hospices offer specialized programs for children, people with specific diseases, "pre-hospice" care for individuals not yet medically-ready for hospice care and other "extra" services that may benefit your family.

How long has the hospice been operating in the community?

Again, length of time in the community may be important to you and your family.

How many patients at any one time are assigned to each hospice staff member who will be caring for the patient?

Some hospices assign a certain number of patients to each staff member and may be willing to share that information with you. That might influence your decision to receive care from a hospice.

What screening and type of training do hospice volunteers receive before they are placed with patients and families?

All volunteers must receive training or orientation on hospice care. Some hospices provide specialized training related to bereavement, pediatric care, nursing home care, etc.

How quickly can the intake/admissions staff come to begin the admissions process? Is someone available at nights or on weekends?

Some hospices are able to begin the admissions process and have someone begin hospice services at night or on weekends. If you are referred to hospice late in the day or on the weekend, a hospice's ability to start services quickly might be very important.

What is the organization's governance structure?

Whether or not the organization is a non-profit, for-profit, government, faith-based or part of a larger healthcare organization may be important to you and your family.

Is the hospice a *We Honor Veterans Partner*?

We Honor Veterans Partners have demonstrated their commitment to improving the care they provide to Veterans and their family members.

