

# Hospice Care

An individual with a **terminal illness** (an illness from which there is little or no chance of recovery and that will most likely cause death in the near future) needs special care, especially as he or she approaches the end of life. Although there may be no chance of recovery from the illness, doctors can help such patients manage the discomfort and pain caused by the illness. Care that focuses on providing comfort rather than life-prolonging measures is called **palliative care**.

When individuals with terminal illnesses reach the last months or weeks of their lives, they often choose to have this type of care. **Hospice care** (see below) provides palliative care along with other services to make the dying process more comfortable. The February 8, 2006, issue of JAMA includes an article about palliative care. This Patient Page is based on one previously published in the February 21, 2001, issue of JAMA.

## HOSPICE CARE

Hospice care is focused on the dying process and helping individuals who are terminally ill (and their family and friends) pass through this process more comfortably. The care may be provided in the patient's home or at a facility designed for patients who are dying.

## GOALS OF HOSPICE CARE

The goals of hospice care are accomplished by offering services and care to

- Manage pain and any other symptoms that cause discomfort or distress
- Create a comfortable environment for the patient
- Allow the patient to be close to family and loved ones during the dying process
- Give relief to the patient's caregivers
- Offer counseling for the patient and those close to the patient

## SERVICES PROVIDED BY HOSPICE CARE

Not all hospice programs will include all of the following, but some of the services that may be available are

- Physician services, including pain management and other comfort care
- Nursing care and services from other health care professionals such as physical therapists
- Psychological counseling
- Spiritual counseling
- Social services and support
- Help with personal care needs, such as bathing, getting dressed, and brushing teeth
- Help with everyday activities, such as running errands and preparing meals
- Respite-care services that give relief for the patient's at-home caregivers
- Grief counseling for loved ones

## THE TEAM APPROACH OF HOSPICE CARE

If you choose hospice care, in addition to your personal doctor, you will be working with a team of health care professionals and volunteers: doctors, nurses, social workers, physical therapists, and volunteer workers.

Sources: National Cancer Institute, American Academy of Family Physicians, National Hospice Foundation, Hospice Association of America, The AMA Family Medical Guide, The AMA Complete Guide to Women's Health, The AMA Encyclopedia of Medicine

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- National Cancer Institute Cancer Information Service  
[www.cancernet.nci.nih.gov](http://www.cancernet.nci.nih.gov)
- The Hospice Association of America  
[www.hospice-america.org](http://www.hospice-america.org)

## INFORM YOURSELF

To find this and previous JAMA Patient Pages, go to the Patient Page Link on JAMA's Web site at [www.jama.com](http://www.jama.com). A Patient Page on palliative care was published in the March 16, 2005, issue; and one on palliative sedation was published in the October 12, 2005, issue.

