



California Hospice Foundation

Don't Wait to Talk About the Care You Would Want

Unfortunately, the following situation is one that's far too common and happens every day all across the country. A family is gathered by the bedside of a loved one who has been seriously ill, and now is likely near the end of life. Each member of the family has a different idea of what should be done and what their loved one would have wanted. Throughout the course of the illness, the family never discussed what the care priorities should be in the final months and weeks of life.

Even in the final days of life, these important decisions go unaddressed. This can leave a dark shadow over the death of a loved one that can linger long in the memory of family and dear friends. No one wants to think they might have done more after a person is already gone.

"Hospice and palliative care professionals see such challenging situations every day," said J. Donald Schumacher, president and CEO of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization.

"It's difficult to know that more could have been done."

One recommendation offered by these professionals who care for the dying would be to learn more about hospice and palliative care long before you or your loved one might need it.

"Don't wait until you are in the midst of a healthcare crisis. After 30 years in hospice, one of the most frequent comments I've heard from families is 'why didn't we get hospice sooner,'" Schumacher said.

When a family is coping with a serious illness and a cure is no longer possible, hospice provides the type of care most people say they want at the end of life: comfort and dignity.

Considered to be the model for high-quality, compassionate care for people with a life-limiting illness, hospice care includes expert medical care, pain management, and emotional and spiritual support. Care is provided by an interdisciplinary team of professionals and trained volunteers. The wishes of the patient and family are always at the center of care. Palliative care brings the same interdisciplinary team care to a patient earlier in the course of an illness and can be provided along with other treatments that may still be underway. Hospices are the largest providers of palliative care services and can help answer questions about what might be most appropriate for a person. Many hospitals also have palliative care teams available to provide services.

Most hospice care is provided in the home – where the majority of Americans have said they would want to be if facing a life limiting illness. Hospice care is also provided in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and hospice centers. The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization reports that more than 1.5 million people received care from hospice every year.

Hospice providers can help with information about care options and choices and ensure you live as fully as possible throughout your entire life. They will make sure your loved ones receive support as well.

Schumacher offered some final advice, “One of the best ways to make sure you and your loved ones benefit fully from hospice and palliative care is to talk about it before it becomes an issue.”