

Considering Hospice

The word "[hospice](#)" may scare patients and family members when they hear the term for the first time. Hospice is generally recommended when a patient has less than six months to live. A referral from a doctor is required to be accepted into a hospice program. Patients must decide to give up on curative treatments for palliative supportive comfort care only. At first, it may be a shock for the patient to face their own mortality. Once patients realize the benefits of hospice, there is usually a great sense of relief.

Hospice provides support in the home at every level. Hospice workers and volunteers include nurses, physical therapists, social workers, nutritionists, chaplains, and home health aids. There are even transportation services. Almost all medical care is provided in the home environment. The overall goal of the hospice team is to enhance the quality of the remainder of the patients' life.

The hospice nurse becomes the eyes and ears of your physician. Instead of making trips to the physicians' office or hospital, most interactions will be over the phone. The nurse will keep your doctor informed on your medical condition and medication needs. You may still visit with your doctor, but the goal is to provide most services in the home.

Although hospice is provided for patients who are dying of their disease, it can greatly enhance the quality of the [patients' remaining life](#). Hospice also provides extensive assistance and support to the caregivers at home. This alleviates the fear many patients have of becoming a burden on the family. It also allows the patient to die with dignity in a comfortable environment.

When a patient develops end stage cancer that is refractory to medical treatments, hospice may be recommended by your physician. The patient and family should ask about hospice care if medical treatment options have been exhausted and they are comfortable with comfort care. Hospice provides valuable services to the patient and family when they are needed the most.