



Having the **Hospice** Conversation

Even physicians with extensive medical training and experience know that having a family conversation about hospice is never easy. Asking your patients what they understand about their illnesses can be a good way to initiate a dialogue and to gauge their impression of their condition. This can also be an opportunity to talk to your patients about their treatment options.

As a medical professional you cannot predict when your patient will die, but you know when a cure isn't possible. Hospice emphasizes comfort and quality of life when a disease is terminal, meaning the prognosis for life expectancy is less than six months if the illness runs its normal course.

We understand that talking about hospice can be difficult. That is why we have developed some talking points to help you with the conversation. Here are some tips, but remember that a member of our team can have this difficult conversation with your patients and their family members if you prefer. We will listen and help you address the patient's fears. There are myths about hospice that we would be happy to dispel.

- Many people think that hospice care is only for the last few days of life, when in fact patients can receive it much earlier. The most frequent feedback received from families on customer satisfaction surveys is that they wish they had learned of hospice sooner.
- Hospice focuses on quality of life – managing pain and symptoms and receiving comfort as well as emotional and spiritual support.
- The hospice benefit is available through Medicare and it provides additional support services to help you cope with the advancing illness. Through Medicare, hospice is covered 100%.
- The hospice benefit provides prescriptions, equipment and supplies related to the hospice diagnosis.
- Hospice patients can continue to see their own primary care and specialist physicians.
- Hospice supports patients and their family through the journey with spiritual and emotional care, including 13 months of bereavement support.
- Patients are granted access to hospice regardless of the presence or absence of an advance directive, though hospice often facilitates these being completed.