Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center

PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

About Hospice Care

This information describes what hospice care is and how it can help you and your caregiver(s).

What's hospice care?

Hospice care is a type of medical care for people with serious illness who have 6 months or less to live.

The benefits of hospice care include:

- Helping you live comfortably by managing your pain and symptoms.
- Helping you and your caregiver cope with any physical and emotional changes you may experience.
- Improving your quality of life.

While hospice care and palliative care (also called supportive care) both help manage your physical and emotional symptoms, they aren't the same thing. Palliative care helps ease the symptoms and side effects of your cancer care so that your quality of life is better. It can start at any point of your cancer care, even while you're still getting treatment. Hospice care starts after you stop getting treatments.

Where can I get hospice care?

You can often get hospice care in your home. Every effort is made to take care of you in your home with your family and loved ones.

Hospice care can also be given in nursing homes, assisted living facilities, and hospice centers. Talk with your healthcare team about what might be best for

you and what your options are based on your insurance coverage.

Who will be part of my hospice team?

A family member or close friend is usually your main caregiver if you get hospice care at home. Your hospice team will support you and your caregiver. Your hospice team can include a doctor, nurse, home health aide, social worker, and chaplain (spiritual counselor). This team focuses on the way you feel physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

If you get hospice care, your healthcare team and your hospice team will work together to care for you. Your hospice team will take over managing your medical care, but your healthcare team will still be part of your care. Instead of going to appointments at Memorial Sloan Kettering (MSK), you may have more phone calls with your MSK healthcare team to talk about your care.

When should I think about getting hospice care?

You may choose to get hospice care if:

- You don't want to continue with cancer treatment.
- You've gotten all the treatment that's available for your cancer.
- Your healthcare team feels that your cancer treatment is no longer working.
- Your healthcare team believes that the burdens of your cancer treatment are greater than the benefits.
- It's the care that best meets your needs.

At some point, many people consider hospice as part of their care plan.

What will happen if I choose to get hospice care?

If you decide to get hospice care, your cancer care will change.

- You will no longer get treatment to try to cure your cancer.

- You won't have certain tests or procedures done related to your cancer.
- While you won't be admitted to the hospital for cancer treatment, there could be times when you're admitted to help you manage symptoms. Your hospice team will do everything they can to keep you comfortable throughout your time in hospice, no matter where you're being treated.

What will hospice care be like?

Your hospice care will be managed by a hospice team of healthcare providers who will work with your healthcare team to give you the best care possible.

Your hospice team will help you manage your pain and other symptoms. You'll also be able to call them at any time and talk with them about your symptoms, medications, and any questions or concerns you may have.

The members of your healthcare team will help you in the following ways:

- Your hospice doctor will manage your care.
- Your hospice nurse will provide nursing care. They will:
  - Visit you in your home.
  - Manage and deliver your medications.
  - Make sure you have the medical supplies and equipment you need.
  - Give support to you and your caregiver.
  - Be available by phone to help you and your caregiver with any problems or give advice.
- Your home health aide will:
  - Visit you in your home for a few hours each week.
  - Help you with daily tasks such as bathing, using the bathroom, grooming (such as brushing your teeth and combing your hair), and eating.
- Your hospice social worker will:
  - Talk with you and your caregiver about any emotional issues or feelings that come up during this time.

    - Give you and your family information on what to expect at the end of life.
- Your chaplain will give spiritual and emotional support to you and your family.

If you become too sick to be cared for at home, your hospice team will arrange for you to get care at a hospital or inpatient hospice service.

If I'm getting hospice care, can I still get treatment for other health problems?

If you have Medicare and decide to get hospice care, Medicare won't pay for treatment that tries to cure your cancer. Medicare will still pay for your other treatments.

For example, if you get hospice care because you have liver cancer, Medicare won't pay for treatment to cure the cancer, such as chemotherapy. But Medicare will still pay for care for other health problems you may have, such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

Who pays for hospice care?

Medicare, Medicaid, and most health insurance plans pay for hospice services. Your nurse case managers can help you and your caregiver figure out how to get your hospice care set up and paid for.

In most situations, your hospice care will include visits from a home health aide a few days a week and visits from a nurse about once a week. If you or your caregiver need more help than what's given, you may need to hire a full-time home health aide or think about moving to an inpatient facility. Insurance may not always cover this, so it's important to check with your insurance company and hospice team.

How can I learn more about hospice?

Your nurse case manager can answer any questions you have about hospice care. A social worker can also talk with you about your feelings about starting hospice care.

You can also talk with other members of your healthcare team to learn more.

Resources

CaringInfo
www.caringinfo.org
This organization provides information about hospice care, including finding a care provider, frequently asked questions, and paying for your care.

If you have questions or concerns, contact your healthcare provider. A member of your care team will answer Monday through Friday from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Outside those hours, you can leave a message or talk with another MSK provider. There is always a doctor or nurse on call. If you're not sure how to reach your healthcare provider, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit www.mskcc.org/pe to search our virtual library.

About Hospice Care - Last updated on June 4, 2021
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