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PATIENT & CAREGIVER EDUCATION

# About Hospice Care

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

## What is hospice care?

Hospice is a type of care for people near the end of their life.

The benefits of hospice 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 have.
- Improving your quality of life.

Hospice care is not the same as palliative care (also called supportive care). Both palliative and hospice care help you manage your pain and symptoms. They're different because palliative care starts when you find out you have cancer and is given at the same time as your cancer treatment. Hospice care starts after you stop receiving cancer treatments.

## Where can I receive hospice care?

Hospice care is most often given in your home. Every effort will be 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 to your healthcare provider about what might be best for you.

# 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. The hospice team can include a doctor, nurse, home health aide, social worker, and spiritual counselor. This team focuses on the way you feel physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

If you receive hospice care, your MSK cancer team and your hospice team will work together to care for you. Your hospice team will take over managing your medical care, but your MSK team will still be part of your care. Instead of going to appointments at MSK, you may have more phone calls with your MSK doctors and nurses to talk about your care.

# When should I consider hospice care?

You may choose to receive hospice care if:

- You don't want to continue with cancer treatment.
- You've received 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 cancer treatment are greater than the benefits.
- It's the care that best meets your needs.

At some point, many patients and caregivers consider hospice as part of their care plan.

# What will happen if I choose to receive hospice care?

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

- You will no longer receive 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 for management of some symptoms that can't be given at home. 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?

With hospice, your care will be managed by a hospice team of healthcare providers that will work with your MSK team to give you the best care possible.

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

- They will manage your pain and other symptoms.
- Your hospice doctor will oversee your care.
- Your hospice nurse will provide nursing care. The nurse will:
  - Visit you in your home
  - Manage and deliver your medications
  - Make sure you have the medical supplies and equipment you need
  - Provide support to you and your caregiver
  - Always be available by phone to help you or your caregiver with any problems or give advice
- Your home health aide will visit your home several hours each week to help you with daily tasks such as taking your medications, bathing, 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.
- If you choose to have a spiritual counselor, they will provide spiritual support to you and your caregiver.
- If you become too sick to be cared for at home, the hospice team will arrange for care at an affiliated hospital or inpatient hospice service.

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

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

For example, if you receive 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 if you have them, such as diabetes and high blood pressure.

## Who pays for hospice care?

Medicare, Medicaid, and most health insurance plans pay for hospice services. Our nurse case managers can help you, and your caregiver figure out the insurance steps you'll need to know to get your care set up and paid for.

In most situations, hospice will provide a home health aide or nurse for a few days per week. If you or your caregiver feel that you 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 center. Insurance may not always cover this, so it's important to check with your plan.

## How can I learn more about hospice?

Your case manager can answer any questions you have about hospice care. If needed, 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

## National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

[www.nhpco.org/about/hospice-care](http://www.nhpco.org/about/hospice-care)

Provides information about hospice care including finding a care provider, frequently asked questions (FAQs), and more information on payment.

If you have any questions, contact a member of your healthcare team directly. If you're a patient at MSK and you need to reach a provider after 5:00 PM, during the weekend, or on a holiday, call 212-639-2000.

For more resources, visit [www.mskcc.org/pe](http://www.mskcc.org/pe) to search our virtual library.

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