

Understanding the Difference Between Hospice and Palliative Care

Hospice and Palliative Care Programs both provide “palliation” or comfort services to their patients, but there are important differences in eligibility, payment, services, and structure that are helpful to know before deciding what is right for you or your loved one.

Question	Hospice	Palliative Care
<p>Eligibility: Who is eligible to receive care?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Those who qualify for hospice have a limited life expectancy of 6 months or less, if the illness runs its normal course. • Many illness can qualify a person for hospice care, not just cancer. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palliative Care services are designed for those who have chronic and/or incurable diseases. • Anyone with a serious illness, regardless of life expectancy, can receive palliative care consults to assess and improve the patient’s comfort.
<p>Treatment: Can I continue to receive my current treatments?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The goal of hospice is to focus on comfort rather than aggressive treatment of disease. Hospice does not cover curative treatment. • Those who elect hospice can concentrate on getting the most of the time they have left, rather than dealing with negative side effects of life-prolonging treatments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The patient may receive palliative care and curative care at the same time. Whether terminal or chronic, life-prolonging therapies are often in progress, and there is not an expectation that they will be avoided. • The palliative care expert can help you decide what treatments are most beneficial to the patient for optimal comfort and symptom control.
<p>Patient Readiness: Making the right choice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Patients who choose hospice want to live out the rest of their time with as much quality as possible, outside of the hospital, surrounded by their loved ones in their own environment. • Studies show that patients on hospice with terminal illnesses live longer than those who do not have hospice care. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There are times when a patient is still trying to digest the news of their serious illness, and are weighing their options for treatment or disease management. They may seek further treatment, or may not be emotionally ready to say “yes” to hospice care. • Palliative care consultants can provide the expertise of symptom management and pain control until the patient and family may be ready to accept the hospice services.

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<p>Services: Who provides the service?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The hospice team includes a physician, a nurse, a social worker, an aide, and often a chaplain who visit on a regular schedule. Bereavement care after death is also provided. • The team provides interdisciplinary care. Hospice serves the <i>unit of care</i>, including the patient, caregivers and family members. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The palliative care team may include a physician and/or a nurse practitioner who provides consultation visits similar to a doctor’s visit. Some palliative care programs provide social workers and chaplains for psychosocial and spiritual care. • The palliative care program serves the patient, and communicates with family members as necessary. As a consult program, the physician, nurse practitioner, or other team member sees the patient while the patient has symptoms that need their expertise.
<p>Medications, Equipment, & Supplies: What else is covered besides professional visits?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Medicare Hospice Benefit covers medical equipment and supplies, medications, and therapies related to the terminal illness. • Hospice also offers short-term respite services allowing the family/caregiver to rest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Palliative Care consults do not cover equipment, medications, and supplies. These costs are separate charges and not paid for by Palliative Care. • The palliative care professionals can make recommendations for medication changes, equipment needs, and supplies to optimize the patient’s comfort.
<p>Location: Where are the services provided?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hospice is available wherever the patient resides: home, assisted living facility, nursing facility, relative’s home, etc. • Some hospices have inpatient facilities to care for their patients. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult your location palliative care program to see if they make home visits. More and more hospitals, nursing facilities, and assisted living facilities are offering palliative care services in their buildings. Some local hospices also offer palliative care services.