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## Tagline

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## Families Across America Value Hospice Care

Numerous studies published in leading medical journals in recent years have shown that families give top marks to the care they receive from hospice.

But which aspects of hospice care do families value the most, and why?

To understand answers to these questions, a team of researchers analyzed survey responses of almost 117,000 family members nationwide whose loved one received hospice care. The results of their survey were published in the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*.

### What Families Like Best About Hospice

Families shared opinions about four major areas of care that most helped their loved one and their families.

#### 1. Communication of Information.

Families said they appreciated that hospice professionals kept them regularly informed about their loved one's condition, medicines prescribed and how they help, and what to expect as the illness progressed.

#### 2. Families' Need for Support.

Receiving emotional and spiritual support from the hospice team (doctors, nurses, social workers, spiritual counselors, and grief counselors) was important to families. In fact, research shows that caregivers are less likely to suffer from depression and anxiety when they receive effective emotional and spiritual support.

#### 3. Coordination of Care.

Hospice families said they found it helpful when one nurse was identified as being in charge of the patient's overall care and when all hospice team members were knowledgeable about the patient's medical history so their loved one could receive the best possible care.

#### 4. Pain Control and Patient Support.

Families appreciated knowing that hospice professionals would be there to effectively manage any physical symptoms their loved one may have and support their feelings or concerns.

The researchers point out, "Since its inception in the 1960s, the hospice movement has constantly evolved to meet the needs of terminally ill patients and their families. Research has consistently shown that hospice ... has improved the quality of care patients receive at the end of life."



## Most Hospice Patients Do Not Have Cancer

Of the 1.4 million Americans receiving hospice care in 2007, almost 60% had illnesses other than cancer.

Hospices care for patients with many non-cancer diagnoses, such as: heart disease, debility, dementia (including Alzheimer's disease), lung disease, stroke or coma, kidney disease, Lou Gehrig's disease and other motor neuron diseases, and liver disease.

The above statistics were reported in the most recent annual report published by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization ([www.nhpc.org](http://www.nhpc.org)).

# Just for Families: A Roundup of National Hospice Research

## Patients Wish They Had Been Receiving Hospice Care Earlier in Their Illness

When 120 patients and families in Texas were asked, “Would it have been easier for you if you started to receive hospice services earlier than you did?” many responded *yes*.

This is according to a research study published in the medical journal, *Home Health Care Management & Practice*.

Experts recommend that patients with a life-limiting illness have at least 90 days of hospice care so they can fully benefit from the many compassionate and professional services of hospice.

However, most patients, such as those interviewed for this study, receive hospice services for only two or three weeks, prompting families to ask, “Why didn’t we get hospice sooner?”

## Doctors Encouraged to Help Their Patients by Suggesting Hospice Care

In an article published in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, a Boston doctor explains to her peers why physicians should be referring more patients to hospice — and referring them much earlier in their illness.

Dr. Gail Gazelle of the Division of General Medicine and Primary Care at Brigham and Women’s Hospital writes, “Hospice care can successfully address the critical end-of-life concerns that have been identified in numerous studies: dying with dignity, dying at home and without unnecessary pain, and

reducing the burden placed on family caregivers.”

Dr. Gazelle also notes, “Evaluation studies reveal consistently high family satisfaction, with 98% of family members willing to recommend hospice care to others in need.”

## Ongoing Communication by Doctors and Nurses Can Help Caregivers

Caregivers want doctors to understand and address the uncertainties they are experiencing on several levels: medical, practical, psychosocial, and spiritual.

In a study published in the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, researchers asked caregivers how health care providers can best help them during

a loved one’s illness. The number-one answer? Communication, which is what the professionals at hospice believe is a top priority.

## Alzheimer’s Association Recommends Hospice Care

The Alzheimer’s Association has released recommendations to address the unique end-of-life care needs of patients with dementia, including Alzheimer’s disease.

In recommending hospice and palliative (comfort) care, the association states, “Access to hospice and palliative care can be particularly helpful in providing expertise regarding the complicated psychosocial and spiritual needs that patients and families may have.”

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