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Tagline

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Heart Disease Patients Are Entering Hospice Care in Increasing Numbers Across the Nation

Hearth disease, the leading cause of death in the U.S., is also the leading non-cancer diagnosis among hospice patients nationwide, according to “Facts and Figures: Hospice Care in America,” an annual report issued by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO).

When U.S. hospice care began in the 1970s, it was thought of as a health care service primarily for patients who had terminal cancer. However, less than 25% of U.S. deaths are currently caused by this disease, and cancer diagnoses now account for just over 35% of hospice admissions, states the NHPCO.

This means that more than two-thirds of hospice patients have a diagnosis other than cancer, and of those, the highest percentage have heart disease. Non-cancer primary diagnoses include:

- Heart disease (14.3%)
- Dementia (13%)
- Lung disease (8.3%)
- Stroke or coma (4.2%)
- Kidney disease (2.4%)
- Debility unspecified (13%)

Dying Americans Deserve to Benefit from the Complete Range of Hospice Services

The most recent NHPCO report also shows a drop in length of service for hospice patients. “What’s important to recognize here is that half of hospice patients received care for less than 20 days,” states J. Donald Schumacher, NHPCO president and CEO. “It’s very difficult for patients and families to take full advantage of the range of services hospice offers when they are under care for only a few days.

“There are no better providers more skilled at providing palliative (comfort) care at the end of life than hospice professionals, and the dying deserve the best care that our society can offer,” Schumacher concludes.



Hospice Can Help Patients with Chronic Kidney Disease (CKD)

In an article published in the *American Journal of Kidney Diseases*, a team of doctors writes, “We... know that patients desire a peaceful death with control of pain and other symptoms. They want family members with them and want to have settled their worldly and existential affairs. They do not want to die in the hospital. Sadly, most deaths [of CKD patients] occur in the acute hospital setting.”

Reassuringly, the authors say options do exist for CKD patients with poor prognoses, including early palliative care and timely hospice referral. They urge doctors to discuss all treatment options — not only dialysis and transplant — with patients. That may include no dialysis, a trial of dialysis, and withdrawal from dialysis when burdens outweigh the benefits.

End-of-Life Care News Briefs for Patients and Families

Hospice Care Recommended for Nursing Home Patients

Noting that nursing homes are the permanent site of care for more than 1.5 million adults in the U.S., and the site of death for approximately one-third of the national population, a team of researchers points out a growing need for hospice care for this vulnerable and often “invisible” group of Americans.

“Given the stark reality that 30% of Americans will die in nursing homes and that more than half of nursing home residents will die within six months of admission, providing hospice or palliative care is essential,” the researchers write in their article published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

Hospice services “increase attention to pain management, improve communication with family members,

and decrease hospitalization at the end of life,” they explain.

Hospice is multidisciplinary, which means it cares for the whole person — physically, emotionally, socially, and spiritually. Hospice also provides the benefit of making advance care planning a continuous process, requiring ongoing discussion as prognoses and preferences change.

Patients Receiving Supportive Care at End of Life Live Longer

Cancer patients who receive supportive care as they approach the end of life not only experience improvement in their quality of life, but they also live longer lives, report researchers of a study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*.

“Even at the end of life, helping patients face death, make informed decisions,

mobilize social support, and control pain is not only humane, but also may be medically more effective than simply continuing aggressive anticancer treatment,” writes David Spiegel, MD, of Stanford University School of Medicine in California.

Spiegel cites the findings of a study of patients with lung cancer in which patients who received early palliative care combined with standard cancer care had statistically better quality of life. They received more hospice care and had fewer emergency room visits and hospitalizations than patients receiving standard cancer care alone.

Spiegel says recent studies show that supportive care increases longevity in other cancer patients with poor prognoses, including those with breast cancer, malignant melanoma, leukemia, and gastrointestinal tract cancers.

Helpful Hospice Websites

www.abcd-caring.org

Americans for Better Care of the Dying

www.caringinfo.org

Caring Connections: National Consumer Engagement Initiative to Improve End-of-Life Care

www.hospicenet.org

For patients and families facing life-threatening illness

www.nhpco.org

National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

www.hospicefoundation.org

Hospice Foundation of America

www.americanhospice.org

American Hospice Foundation

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