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Tagline

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Veterans Administration Partners with Hospice for Better Care of Vets at End of Life

For veterans with a terminal illness, hospice care provides the services they need for comfort and support at the end of life. The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO), in partnership with the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), has pioneered a program called *We Honor Veterans* to address the specific needs of the aging veteran population.

According to the VA, there are over 21 million veterans in America. Many of those find themselves in ailing health after years of faithful military service, and their healthcare needs are unique. “*We Honor Veterans*...invites hospices, state hospice organizations, Hospice-Veteran partnerships, and VA facilities to [focus] on respectful inquiry, compassionate listening, and grateful acknowledgement,” reads the *We Honor Veterans* website. “By recognizing the unique needs of America’s veterans and their families, community providers, in partnership with VA staff, accompany and guide them through their life stories toward a more peaceful ending.”

Hospices participating in the *We Honor Veterans* program have resources dedicated to educating staff in providing veteran-centric care. This means that a veteran will receive expert symptom management, pain relief, and compassionate attention whether he or she enrolls in hospice care at a VA medical center or at home through a community hospice provider. Although hospice care is available at many VA facilities, the large majority of veterans choose to stay at home near family and friends.

These local hospices provide a full range of care for veterans. Members of the hospice care team — including physical and mental therapists, social workers, spiritual caregivers, physicians, nurses, and other staff as needed — are dedicated to treating the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of veteran patients. This wide focus can help provide additional help for veterans, who commonly find combat-related traumas resurfacing as they near the end of life. Additionally, hospice provides extended grief support to families and caregivers, who often experience special bereavement needs when their loved one is a veteran.



The hospice team, working together with the patient and his or her family, develop a plan of care that addresses the special needs of the veteran. The care plan takes into consideration the patient’s symptoms, cultural issues, family resources, military service history, and other factors that are important to the patient and caregivers.

Many patients and families worry about end-of-life medical costs. However, under the Medicare Hospice Benefit, in addition to the VA Medical Benefits Package, hospice care is provided at no cost to veterans. Hospices participating in the *We Honor Veterans* program can assist veterans and their families in accessing VA benefits and to receive support through veteran-to-veteran volunteer programs.

“VA’s palliative and end-of-life care offers an opportunity to provide veterans a peaceful journey across life’s last years, as well as an opportunity to provide them the respect and recognition they so well deserve through dignified, quality care,” states Anthony J. Principi, Secretary of the VA. “[T]he Department of Veterans Affairs [is determined] to do the very best it can for those who once did their very best for us.”

For more information on how hospice can help with veterans’ needs, visit www.wehonorveterans.org or call us directly.

End-of-Life Care Information for Patients and Families

Having Conversations with Children about the End of Life

For many adults, talking about death is difficult, or even considered taboo. This reluctance often leads to delayed discussions about end-of-life care preferences, like the use of CPR, ventilators, or who will be in charge of making care decisions. There is often an even greater taboo about discussing death with children; however, being open to talking about death can help children better understand the dying process.

“Many of us hesitate to talk about death, particularly with youngsters,” states a publication from the National Institutes of Health titled *Talking to Children about Death*. “But death is an inescapable fact of life. If we are to help them [deal with death], we must let them know it’s okay to talk about it.”

Some children are introduced to death for the first time when a loved one dies, which may lead to confusion and fear. Because adult caregivers are going through a grieving process of their own at these times, it can be helpful to talk to children about death before these emotional situations arise. Discussions are easier when integrated into everyday life, such as taking opportunities to point out dead plants or insects to children and answering questions they may have.

Children may also have fears about parents dying, or about what will happen to them in case of accident or injury to adult caregivers. Adults can reassure children that they will always be taken care of, and talk to them about those plans. This gives children a foundation for understanding end-of-life care planning, and lays the groundwork for parents to help their children make similar decisions — like choosing a healthcare surrogate or writing an advance directive — when they become adults.

Visit www.cc.nih.gov/ccc/patient_education/pepubs/childeath.pdf for more help with talking to children about death.

Online Tool Provides Easy Access to Advance Directives

MyDirectives, an online program dedicated to providing easy access to legal advance directives, has recently launched an advance care planning app for iPhone.

“The MyDirectives MOBILE™ App allows consumers to digitize their voice and treatment priorities in a legal advance care plan that is secure in the [electronic] cloud and available 24/7 anywhere in the world,” explains the post on the MyDirectives blog.

Like the MyDirectives webpage, the new app leads consumers step-by-step through the questions necessary to complete a basic emergency medical care plan. Sections include answering questions such as “What is important to you at the end of life?” and “Which of the following statements best describes your thoughts on artificial nutrition and hydration?” with both fill-in answer

boxes and multiple-choice options. The app also allows users to upload video responses using their phone’s camera. When the document is complete, users can “sign” it electronically and appoint a loved one to be a healthcare agent in case of emergency.

Documents are locked and only viewable by the people the user chooses to share them with, including doctors and loved ones. Hospitals that link with MyDirectives will have access to the documents when the user is admitted.

On the mobile app, users can sync their MyDirectives documents to the Medical ID in Apple’s Health app. Because the Medical ID information can be accessed even when the phone is locked, emergency medical teams will have access to care preferences even if a person is unable to communicate.

To complete an advance directive, visit **MyDirectives.com** or search for the free MyDirectives app in the app store.

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Hospice Name

Street

City, State, ZIP

Phone

www.website.com