

Hospice Information for Doctors

An attending doctor does not have to be certain that it is time for the patient to be placed on hospice to make a referral. The medical director at the hospice, who is also a doctor, will evaluate the person to determine if the patient will meet the criteria for hospice. Don't hesitate to make the referral based on finances. Even a patient without insurance or money can receive the hospice benefits for free.

A hospice referral is similar to a referral to any other specialist. The patient's regular doctor can still be the primary doctor, and the patient may return to the doctor's office or hospital for care. But the focus of care is now on comfort, support and symptom management. Aggressive treatments won't be offered anymore.

As the patient's primary doctor, the patient still needs you. Even though you are no longer able to heal the disease, you can heal this person's suffering. You can make sure the patient is getting good pain management and good symptom control, and you can help your patient have a profound and meaningful death. Hospice is a wonderful tool to help your patient on his or her journey toward a good death.

Hospice offers a team of people who help meet the patient's physical, psychological, social and spiritual needs. Hospice provides support for both the patient and the loved ones. Research has found that being on hospice will increase both the quality and quantity of the person's remaining days (Connor et al.2007). Wouldn't you want to live longer and better, even if your days were numbered? I would, and I would want that for those I care about as well.

The referral to the hospice team can be done at any time. Sooner is better than later. Not only is it better for the patient, it is better for the family. The hospice team is there to heal the suffering of the patient as well as the family. After the death, the family will receive bereavement support for twelve to eighteen months. Your patient brought you this handout for a reason; the patient is telling you that he or she is ready for hospice. Please consider referring your patient to hospice so this person can get the care and support he or she needs.