

You, your patient and the family will benefit from an earlier referral to hospice. The patient and family will benefit more from hospice services if they are not referred during a crisis. The unique medical, psychosocial and spiritual support provided by the hospice can assist patients and families as they navigate through all the difficult decisions that need to be made.

Why Should I Refer Earlier and Before a Crisis Occurs?

Studies have shown that 85% of Americans want to die at home and yet 50% of Americans die in the hospital.^{1,2} If you wait to refer the patient until they are hospitalized, you increase the likelihood that the patient will not die at home.

Patients and families who are coping with a life-limiting illness have practical issues to deal with:

- **Business Decisions**
- **Advance Care Planning**
- **Estates and Wills**
- **Funeral Arrangements, etc.**

They also need time to have meaningful conversations and relationships with loved ones. The psychosocial and spiritual support provided by hospice can

be a valuable resource for the patient and the family.

Your goal for your patients is to relieve suffering and assist them to live life to its fullest. An earlier referral to hospice means that specialized pain and symptom management can begin earlier, not only managing current symptoms but also preventing others that may occur. You are ensuring optimal quality of life.

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) 2009 state-of-the-industry report found that the median length of stay was only 21.3 days even though six months of care can be covered by Medicare. At the same time, family evaluations of hospice care remain high and often include comments like “Why didn’t the doctor tell me about this sooner?” An earlier referral to hospice makes life easier for you, the patient and the family.

Benefits

of Referring Your Patient to Hospice Earlier

Intensive pain and symptom management which eliminates or reduces unnecessary hospitalizations/ ER visits

Medications, DME and supplies are provided, making the patient more compliant to their treatment plan

Medication refills are ordered by hospice, which means you and your staff will receive less calls and have more time for other patients

Family support and education relieves caregiver stress and exhaustion which decreases demands on your time

Ability to benefit from a full range of programs and services, including 24-hour access to care, psychosocial programs, volunteer services and grief counseling

When the patient and family receive symptom control and emotional and spiritual support, their quality of life improves as does their satisfaction with you

NHPCO stresses its concern over the increase in short lengths of service and strongly recommends that physicians, patients, and families learn about and discuss end-of-life care options before a health crisis occurs.

You play an important role in providing your patients choices for end-of-life care.