



RIVERCROSS HOSPICE
SERVICES FOR THE MIND, BODY & SPIRIT™

Common Hospice Misconceptions

This list of misconceptions is designed to inform medical professionals about the hospice benefit and to assist with referrals to hospice programs.

1 Hospice is for the last days of life.

Hospice is a program of care with a goal of optimizing comfort and minimizing suffering for patients with incurable illnesses and their families. Their physical, psychological and spiritual needs are attended to by an interdisciplinary team. The benefits are optimized when referrals are made as early as possible. However, the national average for patients receiving hospice care is only 47 days, representing a failure in care for the whole person.

2 Hospice care is only for six months.

The Department of Health and Human Services recognizes the difficulties involved in predicting the prognosis of an individual with a terminal illness and that a disease process runs a unique course in each individual. Therefore, we are provided with unlimited sixty day recertification periods after the first six months as long as the patient still qualifies for a possible six month prognosis. It is widely recognized that many patients, especially those with non-cancer diagnoses, can enjoy prolonged lives due to the care they receive in the hospice program.

3 Hospice represents a failure of care.

It is understandable why this belief is common in a high-tech medical environment which emphasizes curative care. Hospice is a specialty which is centered on

controlling the tenacious and distressing symptoms associated with incurable and terminal illnesses. The true value of hospice becomes evident when we consider the high prevalence of severe, unrelieved suffering as revealed in a Robert Wood Johnson Foundation study of end-of-life care in five hospitals. Known as “The SUPPORT Study”, the results showed that:

- 38% of patients who died spent at least a week in ICU, in a coma or on a ventilator.
- Only 47% of physicians knew when their patients didn’t want CPR.
- 46% of DNR (Do Not Resuscitate) orders were written within 2 days of death.
- 50% of conscious patients who died in a hospital experienced moderate to severe pain for at least half the time prior to death, according to their families.

The Support Study concluded that “Too often we die alone, in pain, attached to machines. The only failure was in not referring patients to palliative care and hospice programs earlier.” Or as the study concludes, “...the system doesn’t know when or how to stop.”

4 Hospice is a place – an inpatient or hospital unit where people go to live until death.

From a recent survey, it is the desire that people die at home – whether that means a private residence, adult care home, assisted living facility or nursing home – in a familiar and comfortable environment. Exceptions occur when inpatient admission is necessary due to the breakdown of family support or when there is a need for intense symptom control.

For more information, visit us at www.rivercrosshospice.com.