

Senior Resources Navigation Notes...

Questions to ask when interviewing for Hospice or Palliative Care

*See the Flyer "Starting Hospice is about comfort, support and care"
for more information on what Hospice actually is.*

What to ask:

- What services does this program provide? What kinds of support can the family & caregiver expect?
- How soon can services begin?
- How will this hospice keep the patient comfortable and free of pain?
- Are there limits on treatment currently being received that this hospice would not be able to do?
- Does this hospice provide services 24 hours a day, 7 days a week? Are all members of the team (nurses, doctors, social workers, chaplains) available in a crisis situation during nights and weekends?
- Does this hospice create a plan of care for each new patient? Is the plan carefully and professionally developed with you and your family? Is the plan of care written out and copies given to all involved? Does it list specific duties, work hours/days, and the name and telephone number of the supervisor in charge? What is the procedure for resolving issues?
- Does this hospice require a designated family primary caregiver as a condition of admission? How much responsibility is expected of the family caregiver? What help can this hospice offer in coordinating and supplementing the family's efforts or filling in around job schedules, travel plans or other responsibilities? If the patient lives alone, what alternatives can this hospice suggest?
- Does a nurse, social worker or therapist conduct a preliminary evaluation of the types of services needed? Is it conducted at the patient's residence, not over the telephone? Does it include consultation with family members, family physicians or other professionals currently providing health and social services?
- Does this hospice have written statements of consumer information that outline services, eligibility criteria, costs, and payment procedures, employee job descriptions, malpractice and liability insurance?
- Get all financial arrangements – costs, payment procedures and billing – in writing. Keep a signed copy. Is there financial assistance if it is needed?
- How will this hospice staff follow the patient's wishes? What happens if they don't?

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- Ask to see a copy of this hospice's patient's rights and responsibilities information.
- How many years has this hospice been servicing your community? Can this hospice provide references from professionals, such as a hospital or community social workers, who have used this hospice? Ask for specific names and phone numbers.
- Does this hospice offer specialized services such as rehabilitation therapists, pharmacists, dieticians or family counselors when these could improve the patient's comfort? Does this hospice provide medical equipment or other items that might enhance the patient's quality of life?
- Does this hospice train, supervise, and monitor its caregivers? Are clinical staff (physicians, nurses, social workers) certified or credentialed in hospice and palliative care? How often does this hospice send a supervisor to the patient's home to review the care being given? Are the caregivers licensed and bonded? What level of background check was performed? (City, state or national level, financial, sex offenses)
- If care-at-home is not an option, where can services be provided (hospice specific residence)? Are room & board & other expenses covered?
- What kind of bereavement services does this hospice offer? Are there any support groups available?
- Is this hospice program Medicare certified and state licensed?
- If certified by Medicare then they are required to follow Medicare rules and regulations. This is important if you wish to receive hospice care as part of your Medicare/Medicaid coverage.
- Is this hospice accredited by Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations (JCAHO)?
- JCAHO is nationally recognized, independent, not-for-profit organization that evaluates and accredits health care organizations and is an important resource in selecting quality health care services. Several organizations accredit hospices, surveying them to ensure they meet quality standards. Accreditation (JCAHO or CHAP) is not required and not having it doesn't mean a hospice isn't good, but if the hospice has it, then you know a third party has looked at the hospice's operations and determined they come up to a reasonable standard of care.
- Is this hospice a National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) member and does it comply with all aspects of NHPCO's Standards for Hospice Programs? Has this hospice completed the Standards Self-Assessment and if so, how recently did they complete it?
- It may be important to your family if the hospice is a non-profit, for-profit, government, faith-based or part of a larger healthcare organization.
- Is this hospice a We Honor Veterans Partner? We Honor Veterans Partners have demonstrated their commitment to improving the care they provide to Veterans and their family members.

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