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HOSPICE

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Palliative Care Helps Patients Suffering from Dementia

Although palliative (comfort) care provided through hospice is often associated with illnesses like cancer, a recent study published in *Home Healthcare Nurse* notes that “patients with dementia have many of the same, if not all of the same symptoms at the end of life as patients with malignant disease, and require the same supportive care...that the palliative care specialists can provide.”

Dementia affects nearly 36 million people worldwide, with that number expected to double by 2030. Like those with other terminal illnesses, many dementia patients suffer from symptoms such as appetite loss, anxiety, pain, confusion, and agitation, which can be physically and emotionally difficult for caregivers as well. Because dementia patients often have trouble communicating, their needs — such as pain relief — may go untreated.

The hospice medical team is trained to identify and manage the needs of dementia patients. According to a national survey conducted in 2010, 94% of hospices had provided care to a



dementia patient within the previous year. The authors of the study note hospice provides services such as “symptom management, developing a plan of care for end of life, and family support,” which can provide comfort and relief to both the dementia patient and his or her family as the end of life draws near.

However, “[d]espite the benefits palliative care could offer those with advanced dementia,” the authors point out that many patients and caregivers are unaware that dementia patients can benefit from palliative care near the end of life. This can be a barrier to getting patients enrolled in hospice.

Although end-stage dementia is a terminal illness, many people think of it only as a memory disorder. This misunderstanding often means that hospice isn’t considered until very late in a dementia patient’s life. This can prevent the patient from receiving all the benefits of comfort care through hospice. “Hospice and palliative care can do much to ease the suffering of those with dementia,” note the authors.

“Quality of life until death is the focus and mission of palliative care, and for people suffering from dementia and their loved ones, the road can be long,” the authors add.

If you or a loved one is suffering from end-stage dementia, talk to your doctor or contact hospice about how palliative care services can help.

How Hospice Can Help

- Hospice care can be provided wherever the patient lives.
- Physical symptoms of dementia are eased with medications and therapy.
- A patient’s emotional, social, and spiritual needs are all addressed by members of the hospice team.
- The hospice care plan is unique to each patient depending on the patient’s condition, values, and beliefs.
- The hospice team provides counseling and grief support for loved ones.

Adapted from Hospice Can Help: A Hospice Care Guide by Quality of Life Publishing Co.

Hospice Information for Patients and Families

Teen Volunteers Gain Life Experience by Hospice Service

For teenagers looking for opportunities to serve in their communities, hospice may be the answer. Hospice provides a special opportunity for high school students to fulfill community service hours while having a special impact in the lives of patients who are nearing the end of life.

“Beginning with the End” is a film that documents teenagers’ experiences as hospice volunteers. Released in early 2015, it follows a group of high school students over a year of hospice volunteering as part of a special Hospice Class. The film highlights the impact that teen volunteers have on hospice patients, as well as the lessons they learn from interacting with those who are at the end of life.

“As the year progresses, students witness the process of dying in a hands-on environment, which helps them understand that death is a part of life. Eventually, they not only become comfortable with volunteering, they look forward to...the care they can provide to others,” explains the film’s website.

Depending on their interests and talents, teen volunteers can read, listen to music, or play games with hospice patients. Teens can also help with planning parties for patients, making crafts, or recording patients’ life stories. Because volunteer hours are flexible and can include weekends and evenings, the often-hectic schedules of high school students can be accommodated.

“By the end of the year,” the website states, “the teenagers explain how they are leaving the Hospice Class with the life lessons not found in textbooks.” At one point in the film, a student begins to cry as she discusses those patients who have died. She then shares, “It was worth it to fall in love with all those people.”

For more information about becoming a volunteer, contact hospice for volunteer opportunities and eligibility requirements.

Pet Therapy Provides Health Benefits for Hospice Patients

As any pet owner can attest, humans are capable of forming unique bonds with their animals that can improve mood and overall quality of life. In fact, more and more studies demonstrate the benefits animal interaction can have on a person’s health.

A report by National Public Radio quotes Rebecca Johnson, a nurse who heads the Research Center for Human/Animal Interaction at the University of Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine, as she describes how interaction with animals can increase people’s level of the hormone oxytocin. “Oxytocin helps us feel happy and trusting,” she states. “Oxytocin has some powerful effects for us in the body’s ability to be in a state of readiness to heal, and also to grow new cells, so it predisposes us to an environment in our own bodies where we can be healthier.”

Many hospices are taking advantage of this benefit by recruiting therapy animals to visit patients. Pet therapy can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, lessen the effects of depression, and provide friendly interaction to patients who may be withdrawn or in pain. Because the end of life can be a very isolating time, some hospice patients pull back emotionally from loved ones. A therapy animal can provide silent companionship that boosts spirits and reduces loneliness.

Pets used as therapy animals must be friendly, gentle, and calm in all situations, including sudden noises and touches. Dogs should have basic obedience skills and be non-aggressive with other dogs. While dogs are the most commonly used therapy animal in hospice, some programs also use cats, rabbits, birds, and other animals to help comfort patients.

If you are interested in becoming certified with your pet as a therapy animal team, contact hospice today.



Some people mistakenly think hospice care is just about dying...nothing could be further from the truth. Hospice helps patients and families focus on living. Angels Grace Hospice, LLC, brings comfort, dignity and peace to help people with a life-limiting illness live every moment of life to the fullest. We also provide support for family and friends.

We are licensed in the state of Illinois, Medicare Certified, Joint Commission Accredited and are locally owned and operated by experienced professionals dedicated to providing excellent end-of-life care for Will, Cook, DuPage, Kendall, Grundy, and Kane counties. Please contact us for more information.

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To comfort always... this is our work

