



## Frequently Asked Questions:

**When should a decision about entering a hospice program be made – and who should make it?** At any time during a life-limiting illness, it is appropriate to discuss all of a patient's care options, including hospice. By law, the decision belongs to the patient. Understandably, most people are uncomfortable with the idea of stopping an all-out effort to "beat" their disease. Hospice staff members are highly sensitive to these concerns and are always available to discuss them with the patient, family and physician.

**Can a hospice patient who shows signs of recovery be returned to regular medical treatment?** Certainly. If improvement in the condition occurs and the disease seems to be in remission, the patient can be discharged from hospice and return to aggressive therapy or go on about his or her daily life.

**What does the hospice admission process involve?** One of the first things hospice will do is contact the patient's physician to make sure he or she agrees that hospice care is appropriate for this patient at this time. Albany Community Hospice medical staff is available to help patients who have no physicians. The patient will also be asked to sign consent and insurance forms. These are similar to the forms patients sign when they enter a hospital. The "hospice election form" says that the patient understands that the care is palliative (that is, aimed at pain relief and symptom control) rather than curative. It also outlines the services available. The form that Medicare patients sign also tells how electing the Medicare hospice benefit affects other Medicare coverage for a life-limiting illness.

**How many family members or friends are needed to care for a patient at home?** There is no set number. One of the first things a hospice team will do is to prepare an individual care plan that will, among other things, address the amount of care-giving a patient needs. The Albany Community Hospice staff visits regularly and is always accessible to answer questions and provide support.

**How difficult is caring for a dying loved one at home?** It's never easy and sometimes can be quite hard. At the end of a long progressive illness, nights especially can be very long, lonely and scary. So, Albany Community Hospice has staff available around the clock to consult with the family and to make night visits as appropriate.

**What specific assistance does hospice provide home-based patients?** Hospice patients are cared for by a team of doctors, registered nurses, social workers, counselors, home health aides, spiritual caregivers, therapists and volunteers – and each provides assistance based on his or her area of expertise. In addition, hospices help provide medications, supplies, equipment, hospital services and additional helpers in the home, as appropriate.

**Does hospice do anything to make death come sooner?** Hospices do nothing either to speed up or slow down the dying process. Just as doctors and midwives lend support and expertise during the time of child birth, so hospice provides its presence and specialized knowledge during the dying process.



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**Is the home the only place hospice care can be delivered?** No. Although most hospice services are delivered in a personal residence, patients are also cared for in nursing homes and in assisted living facilities, as well as in the Willson Hospice House.

**How does hospice “manage pain”?** Hospice nurses and doctors are up-to-date on the latest medications and devices for pain and symptom relief. Hospice believes that emotional and spiritual pain are just as real and in need of attention as physical pain, so it addresses these, as well. Counselors, including spiritual caregivers, are available to assist family members as well as patients.

**Is hospice care covered by insurance?** Hospice coverage is widely available. It is provided by Medicare nationwide, by Medicaid in some 47 states, including Georgia and by most private health insurance policies. Albany Community Hospice provides care to everyone without regard to the ability to pay.

**Does hospice provide any help to the family after the patient dies?** Albany Community Hospice provides continuing contact and support for family and friends for at least thirteen months following the death of a loved one. Albany Community Hospice also provides supportive services for anyone in the community who has experienced the death of a family member, a friend, or a loved one.