



Benton
Hospice
Service

HOSPICE CARE SAVES TIME, MONEY AND ENERGY

Generations (Gazette-Times, Democrat-Herald)

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by Karen Nousen, Outreach Coordinator

The challenges of a terminal illness or condition are huge. There are physical issues to deal with: pain, nausea, and the loss of mental and physical capabilities to mention just a few. There are practical issues that need to be handled: advance directives, medical equipment, caregiving schedules, and final arrangements. And then there are the emotional and spiritual aspects of what it means to be leaving this world and people you care about.

Working through all these issues is a tough task, not just for the person who is dying, but for family and friends, too. It requires time, money, and a great deal of energy from everyone. Fortunately, hospice care offers ways to make the dying process a little easier.

Hospice offers medical, practical, and emotional support to the patient at home—or wherever s/he might call home—and to family and friends as well. A team of professionals brings its skilled expertise to deal with the physical and emotional challenges of a life-limiting illness or condition. Living as fully and as comfortably as possible in the time that remains is the goal of the entire team.

“Many families are navigating the distressing issues of serious illness, caregiving, final arrangements, and financial or legal planning for the first time,” comments Lucy Noone, Executive Director of Benton Hospice Service. “Our staff works with them daily and can make the impossible feel much more manageable.”

When a person enters hospice and a care team is put into place, those who have been juggling the many aspects of care have a chance to take a deep breath and, maybe for the first time in a long time, relax. They aren’t alone anymore. Now they have a hospice nurse visiting regularly who has expertise in pain control and symptom management. There may be a hospice aide doing personal care, or a social worker helping to organize a care schedule. Maybe now a volunteer comes to visit, giving the caregiver a break in his or her day.

“When a spouse or child is putting all their time and energy into caregiving, often their role as wife or husband, daughter or son is diminished or lost,” says Sharon Harr, Benton Hospice Service social worker. “Help from hospice can help preserve the quality of those relationships.”

For many family caregivers, there is tremendous relief in having the help and support of people who have experience in caring for the dying, who know what kind of resources are available, and who will be there offering encouragement and support through the entire experience. The hospice team provides caregivers with the tools,

teaching, and support needed to feel confident in their ability to care for their loved one. Support from the hospice team allows physical and mental energy to be focused on making the time that remains the best that it can be.

In addition to increasing the *quality* of time a terminally ill person may have, hospice care may also increase the *quantity* of time left, too.

A study reported in the March 2007 Journal of Pain and Symptom Management identified people with five different diagnoses and then tracked them as they accepted or declined hospice care. Overall, *people who chose hospice lived an average of 29 days longer* than those who did not. For some specific diagnoses, the difference in survival time was even greater: lung cancer patients lived an additional 39 days on average and congestive heart failure patients lived an average of 81 days longer.

While many recognize the value hospice can offer, often they don't understand how hospice is paid for, thinking that perhaps it is another out-of-pocket expense. Medicare and most private insurance companies offer a hospice benefit. What this means is that when a terminally ill person enters hospice care, hospice pays for all medications related to the terminal illness, any needed equipment and supplies (such as wheelchairs, hospital beds, bedside commodes, etc.) and every single home visit by team members.

This can be a huge financial relief for a patient and family. *Hospice care often saves money* and may relieve a great deal of bill-paying worries. Generous community support allows Benton Hospice Service to care for those who do not have Medicare or private insurance, and who can't afford to pay for care.

If you want to learn more about hospice and how it may help you to you or someone you care about save time, money, and energy, please call Benton Hospice Service at 541-757-9616 or visit our website at www.bentonhospice.org.