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Breaking down hospice myths

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Heart 'n Home Hospice is actively engaged in educating both the general and professional communities about hospice and its services. While educating these communities we have found that many people have their own ideas regarding hospice. These ideas usually stem from personal experience, whether good or bad, or that of a friend. It could be that they simply read or heard through some other source about hospice and its benefits.

There are many myths in regards to hospice — myths, falsehoods and misconceptions. One of the most common myths out there today is that hospice is only for people with cancer. Medicare has lengthened the arms of hospice, which allows more people the opportunity to reap the benefits of its services. More than one-fifth of hospice patients nationwide have diagnoses other than cancer. In urban areas, hospices serve a large number of HIV/AIDS patients. As long as the individual meets the admission criteria, Heart 'n Home Hospice cares for persons of any age with any terminal illness. These illnesses include, but are not limited to: end stage heart disease, stroke, lung disease, Alzheimer's disease and other dementia, kidney disease, adult failure to thrive, diabetes, as well as all types of cancers, etc.

Another common myth is that hospice care is expensive. Most people who use hospice are over 65 and are entitled to the Medicare Hospice Benefit. This benefit covers virtually all hospice services and requires little, if any, out-of-pocket expense. Some hospices elect to charge co-pays for medications or as much as 5 percent of any respite care that is given. Heart 'n Home has elected not to charge a patient or family anything. Hospice care is free.

About three months ago Heart 'n Home was called by a physician to go to one of his patient's homes and talk to them about hospice. We promptly went to see this lovely patient. When our nurse first arrived, the patient's family was not there yet. As the nurse went over all the services that we were going to provide for her, she was pleasantly surprised. When her daughter arrived, her reaction to hospice being there was entirely common. She said, "Mom, do you know that this nurse is from hospice?" The patient's reply was classic, "I don't care what they call themselves. All I know is that I get a nurse that comes in, a bath aide, medications related to illness, and a whole lot of other things, and the best part about it is I get all of it for free." It did not matter to the patient what the service was called, she just knew she needed it.

Another frequently heard myth is that you have to be homebound once you elect for hospice. This is incorrect. We want our patients to live life to its fullest. We encourage our patients to be active. Our hospice team will assist patients and families in achieving individual goals and dreams as much as possible.

For example, we had one patient who, every year for the last 15 years, flew down to Florida to visit family. We made sure that he had all the medications and equipment he needed. We also contacted a local hospice in Florida and let them know that their services might be required if his illness were to take a turn for the worse. This patient made it to his sister's house in Florence Ore. before he had to stop. We found him a hospice in Florence where he still resides. Even though our patient didn't make it to his final destination, he still was able to try.

The common illusion that hospice patients cannot keep their own doctor and receive hospice care is untrue. Hospice does not require a patient to change physicians in order to receive hospice care.

In fact, hospice patients must have a primary physician who works in coordination with the hospice team.

We love that our patients are able to still see their doctor. In most cases, their physician has been with them for many years, and the patient and family feel very comfortable with them.

Hospice is merely an added bonus, an extra service that works with the many other services that are available in the medical field. Hospice will work with any physician you desire.

Often times individuals have the false idea that hospice care is only provided in the home. Hospice services are provided in numerous locations, whether it be a house, nursing home, assisted living facility, or wherever. We always take our services to you. Yes, hospice is more often than not given in the home because this is where people feel the most comfortable. That's the beauty of hospice; we want what is best for you.

The last common myth is that hospice is for when there is no hope.

When the end is in sight, there are two options one can choose: submit without hope or live life as fully as ever until the end. The gift of hospice is its capacity to help families see how much can be shared at the end-of-life through personal and spiritual connections often left behind. Hospice is about living, not dying.

It is no wonder that most family members can look back upon their hospice experience with gratitude and with the knowledge that everything possible was done towards a peaceful death.

It is important that we as human beings talk about end-of-life issues. None of us is exempt.

Remember, hospice isn't about dying; it's about living and making each journey the best it can be. Hospice is about living life to its fullest, up to the final moment. It's about receiving comfort and care. It's about surrounding yourself and your loved ones with medical, emotional and spiritual support. Hospice doesn't give us the power to shorten or prolong life. It gives you the power to live it as you choose; to be at home, if you wish; to be pain-free; and to be comforted and cared for.

This is the essence of hospice. This is what we want people to understand and this is why we love what we do.

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to call the staff at Heart 'n Home Hospice and Palliative Care, LLC, at one of our local offices: Fruitland, (208) 452-2663; Emmett, (208) 365-2099; Caldwell, (208) 454-0262; and Baker City, (541) 524-7688. Visit our Web site, www.heartnhomehospice.com.