

Hospice is a program not a place

By SHARON KERR Staff Writer

Hospice care is a misunderstood concept people often confuse it with *hospital*, when in fact it is a program, not a place.

Jasper has two hospice providers. Lakes Area Hospice began operating in 1993 and is part of the Texas Non-profit Hospice Alliance. Odyssey Health Care is the second largest hospice provider in the country; the Jasper office was licensed in May of this year.

Both organizations serve a wide territory in the Jasper area, including Hemphill, Woodville, Newton and south Jasper County.

What is hospice care?

Hospice care is for terminally ill patients and aims at palliative care and supporting the emotional and spiritual needs of both the patient and the family, within whatever setting is most appropriate.

A hospice is not a place people go to die. Lakes Area Hospice's slogan is, "It's about how you LIVE." Most patients remain in their own homes as long as possible; others may be in nursing homes or hospitals.

Palliative care is defined as relieving or soothing symptoms (from Latin *palliare* -to cloak). Palliative care aims at improving the quality of life, controlling pain, easing the psychological and spiritual fears of dying, and supporting the family through the grieving process.

Dr. Elisabeth Kubler Ross is credited with the inspiration for the hospice movement with her book *On Death and Dying*, wherein she describes the five stages of grief: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, acceptance.

The hospice movement took off in the early 80's when Congress approved Medicare and Medicaid funding. In the early 90's, nursing homes were included in the funding program. **When is hospice care appropriate?**

By most definitions, hospice care is recommended when, in the physician's best judgment, there is the reasonable expectation of death within six months. The patient or family may also request hospice care, subject to a physician's approval.

Donna Moss, social worker for Odyssey, says it is important that the patient and the family be on the same page. She gives an example of a husband who wanted aggressive measures for his wife with cancer; in this case, hospice care was not appropriate.

When aggressive treatment such as chemotherapy is no longer beneficial and instead reduces the quality of life remaining, that's the time for hospice care, according to hospice philosophy. Paula Moore, volunteer coordinator for Lakes Area Hospice, says that "one good day when you are dying of something is a fantastic gift."

According to Jeannette Coffield, executive director of Lakes Area Hospice, hospice care includes chronic diseases, organ failure, and the end stages of things like Alzheimer's.

Coffield says it is not just for old people young people and even children have participated in Lakes Area's program.

What does a hospice do?

Hospice care workers provide the support needed during the final stages of an illness. Managing pain is probably what is uppermost in people's minds, but the simple tasks such as shopping when a patient becomes homebound can also be handled by hospice helpers.

Hospice staff seek to find the right level of care. In the early stages, that may be a weekly visit and frequent phone calls; in the end stages when a patient is actively dying, it may mean around the clock in-home assistance.

Hospice care aims at treating symptoms such as pain, nausea, breathing difficulties and usually a growing list of disabilities. The hospice arranges medicine, therapy, and equipment as needed for patient care.

Besides nurses and a medical director, the hospice also addresses the wellbeing of the family as a whole. They provide a social worker and chaplain, respite care for caregivers, and aides and volunteers to help with daily living.

The decision to use hospice services takes into account family situations. Moss says, "We look at what their support system is. If their condition starts to slip, we look at their resources and work with them, whether it be finding them

additional assistance so they can remain at home, or nursing home placement where hospice will continue to work with them." Family, hospice volunteers, and church members may participate in the supporting care.

Coffield says of the counseling provided by Lakes Area Hospice, "Grief begins when you get a life-limiting diagnosis." Both hospices provide grief counseling for the family for up to a year after the patient dies.

Philosophy of hospice care:

"Hospice care is not just for somebody when they are dying," Moss says. It's about "allowing somebody who has made a decision that they just want to live their life as long as they can, the best way they can, without extraordinary means...it's about enjoying the quality of life (that is) left."

Coffield points out that many families, and even many doctors, do not know when to begin the dialogue about the end of life. Coffield says, "The time to do it is right now." By that she means every adult, starting at age 18, should have clear instructions naming a health care provider and power of attorney prepared and ready, with copies in the hands of family members, in the glove compartment, in a purse or wallet where emergency workers would find it and have immediate information as to the person's wishes.

She points out that a person who begins hospice care can always revoke it at any time, should they hear of a treatment they would like to try.

David Slaughter, regional manager of Odyssey, says they have even had patients recover and leave hospice care. One example was a woman suffering "failure to thrive," an umbrella diagnosis that includes lack of response to nutritional support and general decline. Once her pain was under control and physical therapy made her feel better, she recovered to the point she recently attended a class reunion.

Slaughter says, "We get so many patients so late in this process." In some cases, the patient has only a few days or hours, which is why they approach every patient with a sense of urgency. Slaughter says, "You only get one chance to do this right."

For more information on hospice care, visit these sites: www.tnpha.org Texas NonProfit Hospice Alliance
www.lakesareahospice.org Lakes Area Hospice www.odshealth.com Odyssey Health Care

Lakes Area Hospice office is located 254 Ethel St. in Jasper.

Odyssey Health Care office is located at 130 S. Main in Jasper.