

# Layton Aging & Alzheimer's Disease Center

## Hospice Care

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### **Considering Hospice Care For a Person with Alzheimer's Disease**

A person with Alzheimer's disease can qualify for hospice care. While only a small percentage of families use these services, there are benefits for the patient and family. Here is information to help you to make a wise decision about the option of hospice care.

#### **What is hospice care?**

Hospice is a compassionate way to care for persons with a terminal illness and their families. The treatment focus is comfort and quality of life, when cure is no longer realistic. Hospice does not seek to hasten death or prolong life, instead to follow the natural course of the illness.

Care for the patient includes: pain control, symptom management, medications, equipment, social, emotional and spiritual support. Care for the family includes: education and training about physical care, counseling and support services, including bereavement support after the death.

A team of trained professionals (physicians, nurses, clergy, social workers, therapists, aides and volunteers) is involved depending upon the patient and family needs.

Hospice care is delivered wherever the person resides: home, foster care, assisted living, nursing home or in a separate hospice setting.

Hospice care is a benefit option under Medicare Part A for an eligible person. Hospice care is also covered under Medicaid in most states and most major medical insurances. Most hospices will provide care regardless of ability to pay.

#### **How is a person with Alzheimer's disease determined to be eligible for hospice care under Medicare?**

A person has Medicare Part A

A personal physician and a hospice medical director determine that the patient is terminally ill -- the life expectancy is six months or less, assuming that the illness runs its normal course. A set of guidelines from the National Hospice and Palliative Care

Organization is used to help identify patients with Alzheimer's disease who are likely to have a terminal prognosis of six months or less if the disease runs its normal course.

A designated medical power of attorney or family member signs a statement choosing hospice care instead of standard Medicare benefits for treating the terminal illness. This indicates that the family is agreeing to palliative, not curative care and no extreme measures to prolong life.

### **Hospice can be discussed**

It is appropriate to discuss the option of hospice with a health care provider at anytime. Thinking about this hospice option early in the course of Alzheimer's disease can help in clarifying values held by the person with the disease. These values can inform decisions made throughout the illness that subsequently may affect end-of-life care. Discussions with local hospices and resources listed below can be helpful.

Families cannot assume that a person is hospice eligible. Making a prognosis is an inexact science. The normal course of Alzheimer's disease is prolonged and varied making a prediction of time until death more difficult. Ultimately it is the physician's judgment in evaluating the person with regards to the guidelines.

### **How hospice works**

Hospice does not take the place of the family (or health care staff at a facility) by providing the needed 24hour care. Hospice is intermittent care available 24 hours a day/ 7 days a week to provide support, advice, and assistance to those involved in the direct care.

Referrals can be made to hospice by a primary physician, family members, friends, clergy or other health professionals.

The duration of hospice is divided up into two benefit periods of 90 days each. This may be added to by an unlimited number of 60day periods. At the beginning of each period, the physician must certify that the person is terminally ill.

### **Other sources of information:**

A hospice in your area can answer questions you may have:

- National Hospice Association and Palliative Care Organization [www.nhpco.org](http://www.nhpco.org)
- Oregon Hospice Association (503) 228-2104 [www.oregonhospice.org](http://www.oregonhospice.org)
- Alzheimer's Disease and Related Disorder's Association [www.alz.org](http://www.alz.org)
- Oregon-Idaho Chapter of the Alzheimer Association 1-800-733-0402