

Questions and Answers

Q: Who do I contact with questions about the VA?

A: Each VA has a designated Palliative Care Coordinator who is able to answer questions.

Q: If an enrolled Veteran does not have Medicare, will the VA pay for the hospice care?

A: Yes, Hospice and Palliative Care is part of the VA's Medical Benefits Package, for enrolled Veterans.

Q: How does a Veteran qualify for VA paid Hospice Care?

A: Under the VA Medical Benefits Package, an enrolled Veteran must be diagnosed with a life-limiting illness, decide that the focus of care is on comfort rather cure, have life expectancy, deemed by a VA physician, of six (6) months or less if the disease runs its normal course, and accepts Hospice Care.

Q: What is the VA's responsibility in terms of offering Hospice and Palliative Care?

A: Veterans who choose Medicare retain their eligibility for VA care and benefits.

Q: Does a Veteran need to have a service connected condition in order for VA to provide Hospice?

A: No

Q: Can Veterans continue to use the VA and utilize the Medicare Hospice benefit?

A: Yes

Q: I have a Veteran who is in need of community in-patient Hospice Care; will the VA pay for room and board?

A: If the Veteran is placed by VA in a community nursing home for the purpose of hospice care, the cost of care including the nursing home portion of the care is covered by the VA hospice benefit. This will also include Home Hospice Care. Veterans who choose Medicare retain their eligibility for VA care and benefits.

Q: How shall we model the special needs of Veterans at the end-of-life?

- A. Total Pain - physical, psychological (emotional), social, and spiritual.
- B. Physical distress at end-of-life.
- C. Psychological distress with advanced illness.
- D. Social distress with advanced illness.
- E. Spiritual distress with advanced illness.

Q: What is the cost of end-of-life care provided to the Veteran at the VA Medical Center?

A: Inpatient hospice at the VA is of no cost to the Veteran or the Veteran's family.

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Chaplain's Veterans and Hospice Care Pocket Guide





The Purpose of Hospice

The purpose of Hospice is to provide support and care for Veterans in the final phase of terminal disease so that they can live fully and comfortably as possible. Hospice affirms life and regards dying as a normal process and hospice neither hastens nor postpones death. Through personalized services at the VA or local Hospice organizations, Veterans can attain the necessary preparation for a death that is satisfactory to them. Dying people have the potential to learn, teach, console, enjoy, plan and laugh during this period of living. Veterans have the right of becoming informed of their disease, treatments, prognosis, and alternatives that are available to them. Veterans have the right to accept or refuse treatments. Family caregivers have special roles and they may impact on the Veteran's wishes. Hospice provides supportive help to families who may have adjustments to make in their loved one's illness and death. Hospice is dedicated to the relief of symptoms and the promotion of care.

“The Veterans we serve today have survived the battles – battles they fought to preserve our freedom. It is our privilege and our responsibility to be there for them, to offer comfort, support and care as they face their final days. Together, with pride and urgency we steadfastly pursue our VA mission in Hospice and Palliative Care – to honor Veterans’ preference for care at the end of life.” (Dr. Thomas Edes, Chief, Offices of Geriatrics and Extended Care, Dept of VA)

Historically, the VA implemented a new policy in 1992 indicating that all Veterans should be provided access to a Hospice program, either within the VA system or through referral to a community Hospice agency. In 1999, the initiative of pain as a 5th vital sign was adopted in all VA facilities, and VA physicians prescribed Palliative Care education and internal medicines. This created resources and development of Hospice and Palliative Care programs within all of the VA hospitals. In 2001, the VA launched its VA Hospice and Palliative Care Initiative through generous grants by the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. It focused on improving Veterans’ access to Hospice and Palliative services within the VA and in the community and included efforts to improve end-of-life care education and facilitate the development of VA/Hospice partnerships. Currently, all VA facilities have Hospice

consult teams that involve nursing, medicine, social work, and Chaplain services. I highly recommend that you visit the VA Medical center and know your Hospice team!



Palliative Care	vs Hospice Care
Physical and psychosocial relief	Physical and psychosocial relief
Focus on quality of life	Focus on quality of life
Multidisciplinary Team Approach	Multidisciplinary Team Approach
Any stage of disease	Prognosis 6 months or less
May be concurrent with curative treatment	Excludes curative treatment