

In partnership with



# What is hospice care?



Finding out that you, or someone close to you, has a life-limiting or terminal illness can be an overwhelming experience that may leave you with many questions. Often these questions will be about the care that is available as the illness progresses. You may have heard about hospice care but have questions about what it involves and what it might be like. This leaflet aims to answer those questions.

## What is hospice care?

A hospice is not just a building, it is a way of caring for people. Hospice care aims to improve the lives of people whose illness may not be curable. It helps people to live as actively as possible after diagnosis to the end of their lives, however long that may be. The highest value is put on respect and choice.

Hospices not only take care of people's physical needs, they consider their emotional, spiritual and social needs too. And they support families and close friends, both during the illness and in bereavement.

The services offered will differ from hospice to hospice but are likely to include:

- medical and nursing care
- pain and symptom control
- rehabilitation
- therapies, including physiotherapy and complementary therapies
- spiritual support
- practical and financial advice
- bereavement care.



## What is palliative care?

Palliative care is the name for the type of care provided by hospices and is also provided in other places such as hospitals and care homes.

*“The care that I have received has been amazing. It's not just about what they can do for you physically, but how they can help emotionally too.”*

**From a hospice patient**

## Who can get hospice care?

Hospice care is open to all. Hospices help people with cancer and with other life-limiting illnesses such as neurological conditions (eg Motor Neurone Disease), HIV, and heart and lung conditions.

There are hospices for adults and for children.



## Where is hospice care provided?

Hospices provide care in a number of different places including in people's own homes, in day therapy units and in inpatient units. Palliative care can also be provided in hospitals and care homes.

## In people's own homes

Many people wish to be cared for in their own home. This is made possible by community palliative care nurses and Hospice at Home services.

Community palliative care nurses offer specialist care including:

- advice on pain and symptom control
- hands-on nursing
- practical advice
- emotional support.

Hospice at Home services are provided by a multiprofessional team. They allow people to receive hospice care services in their own homes; this may be for end of life or respite care, or sometimes it may be during a time of crisis. Some teams can offer 24-hour nursing care.

Hospices and palliative care teams will provide support for carers in the community too; this may be through a support and information group or by providing one-to-one advice.

*“We did not feel on our own as we confronted the most difficult period of our lives.”*

**From a carer**

## In day therapy

Day therapy gives people the opportunity to spend time in a hospice without being admitted as an inpatient – allowing them to access the care and support they need while continuing to live at home. The care and support offered includes:

- medical and nursing care
- rehabilitation
- creative therapies
- complementary therapies.

Day therapy also gives people the opportunity to meet others in a similar situation. Transport to and from day therapy may be provided by the hospice.

## In inpatient units

People may sometimes be admitted for inpatient care at an early stage of their illness for a short period of intensive care followed by ongoing support. It could be for rehabilitation after treatment, or for control of symptoms such as pain, nausea or vomiting. People may also be admitted to a hospice during the very final stages of their illness. Generally people only stay in an inpatient unit for a short period of time, perhaps 10 to 14 days, and will then return to their home or other care setting.

“I feel safe and know they are always there for me and my family.”

**From a hospice patient**

## In hospital

There are palliative care teams which work within hospitals alongside surgeons, physicians, nurses and other health and social care professionals. Their role is to support the hospital staff by providing education, training and specialist advice on pain and symptom control.

The team will also provide emotional support directly to individuals and their carers, as well as advising staff on planning people's discharge home or transfer to another care setting such as a hospice, community hospital or care home.

In some hospitals there is a whole team, including doctors, nurses, social workers and chaplains, while in others a single nurse provides the service.



## Who provides hospice care?

Most hospice care is provided by charitable hospices. The NHS also provides hospice and palliative care.

GPs, district nurses, paid carers and health and social care staff in hospitals and nursing homes can provide a general level of palliative care. However, they will use a hospice or palliative care team when more specialist support is needed.

## How can you be referred for hospice care?

People may be referred for hospice care as soon as a diagnosis is made, not just at the very end of life. A referral is normally made by a person's own GP or hospital doctor. A district nurse may also make a referral to a community palliative care nurse or Hospice at Home service. People are usually referred to their nearest hospice or palliative care team, but in special circumstances out-of-area referrals may be considered.

## Do you have to pay for hospice care?

No. Hospice or palliative care is free to all.

## Are hospices religious places?

No. Some hospices have a Christian foundation, but hospices aim to meet the needs of people from all cultures and religions and of those with no faith.

# How can I find out more about hospice care?

For more information on hospice care, please contact Help the Hospices:

## Help the Hospices

Help the Hospices is the leading charity supporting hospice care throughout the UK. In partnership with St Christopher's Hospice, we provide the Hospice information service, which can tell you about the hospice care available in your area. Our website also contains details of a number of support organisations, including those for specific illnesses.

Tel: **020 7520 8222**

**[www.helpthehospices.org.uk](http://www.helpthehospices.org.uk)**

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