Dispelling Hospice Myths: 
10 TRUTHS ABOUT HOSPICE CARE

Mary K. Spengler, MS, Executive Director, Hospice & Palliative Care of Westchester

WHILE MORE THAN 1.5 MILLION AMERICANS DIE EACH YEAR IN HOSPICE CARE, accounting for nearly 60 percent of all deaths in the U.S., according to the most recent data, many other Americans eligible for these services did not elect them because of the stigma, fears, and misinformation linked to the end-of-life care. Conversely, hospices nationwide report consistently that patients and families wish they elected hospice sooner.

The following hospice myths have been dispelled to help people make an informed decision about end-of-life care.

Contrary to the common belief, hospice is not a place. Hospice care usually takes place in the comfort of an individual’s home, but can be provided in any environment in which a person lives, including a nursing home or assisted living facility.

Many also believe that hospice is only for cancer patients. In reality, more than 50 percent of hospice patients nationwide have a diagnosis other than cancer. Hospice cares for people with any serious or life-limiting illness, including; heart disease, cancer, Lou Gehrig’s disease, cirrhosis, emphysema, kidney disease, AIDS and Alzheimer’s disease, among others.

Hospice is not just for the patient. Hospice care focuses on comfort, dignity, and emotional support of the patient as well as family members and caregivers. Hospice & Palliative Care of Westchester (HPCW) offers a wide range of bereavement services and support for family members for up to 13 months after the patient has passed away.

Some believe that once you choose hospice care, there’s no going back to traditional medical treatment. Patients, however, are free to leave a hospice program at any time for any reason without penalty. If a patient’s condition improves or the disease goes into remission, he or she can be discharged from hospice and return to aggressive, curative measures, if so desired. If a discharged patient wants to return to hospice care, Medicare, Medicaid, and most private insurance companies and health management organizations (HMOs) will allow readmission if he or she meets the medical eligibility criteria.

There is a misconception that if you choose hospice care, you won’t get other medical care and can no longer receive care from a primary care physician. While the hospice team will provide all aspects of care for the illness that qualifies you for hospice services, you are still free to seek treatment for unrelated illnesses or conditions. For example, if you are receiving hospice care for heart disease, you can still get treatment continued inside

IN CELEBRATION

HPCW hosted its 23rd annual “In Celebration” gala on September 17, 2015 at Westchester Country Club in Rye, where we honored Sheldon Alter, MD (WESTMed Medical Group), the Lee Family & Lee’s Funeral Home, LLC, and Connie A. Raffa, J.D., LL.M. (Partner, Arent Fox LLP) with a special tribute given to Anna L. Shereff, founder of The Anna and Louis H. Shereff Caregiver and Complementary Care Programs at HPCW. The grand sponsor for this year’s event was Anna L. Shereff. Premier sponsors included Apple Bank for Savings; Arent Fox LLP/Attorneys at Law; The Hildegarde D. Becher Foundation, Inc.; Michele Fraser Geller; Grassy Sprain Pharmacy; Key Bank; VNS Westchester; White Plains Hospital; and White Plains Radiology Associates, P.C.
for a broken bone. Hospice also works closely with your primary physician and considers the continuation of the patient-physician relationship to be the highest priority.

Patients are still eligible to receive hospice care through Medicare and other insurances after six months. According to the Medicare hospice program, services may be provided to terminally ill Medicare beneficiaries with a life expectancy of six months or less. However, if the patient lives beyond the initial six months, Medicare, Medicaid, and many other private and commercial insurances will continue to cover hospice services as long as the patient meets hospice criteria of having a terminal prognosis and is recertified with a limited life expectancy of six months or less by the Hospice Medical Director.

Not all hospices are the same. It’s true all licensed hospice programs must provide certain services, but the range of support services and programs can differ. Like other medical care providers, the business models differ. Additionally, hospice programs and operating styles may vary from state-to-state depending on laws and regulations, and some programs are not-for-profit and some hospices are for-profit. For example, HPCW provides Complementary Care programs and services, such as massage therapy, music therapy, reflexology, reiki and art therapy, while other hospices may not offer these programs or rather variations of these services.

It is not solely the doctor’s responsibility to bring up hospice. While it is the physician’s responsibility to determine whether a patient meets the medical eligibility criteria to receive hospice services, it is appropriate for the patient or caregiver to initiate the discussion and call hospice for information.

A patient does not need to be bedridden to be eligible for hospice care. Hospice care is appropriate at the time of the terminal prognosis, regardless of the patient’s physical condition. Many of the patients served through hospice continue to lead productive and rewarding lives.

Many worry that hospice care is too expensive. Most people over 65 years of age may have Medicare insurance, which covers hospice services with little out of pocket expenses. However, Medicare is not the only insurance that provides coverage for hospice care. Most private plans, HMO’s and other health care organizations include hospice care as a benefit. Additionally, through community contributions, memorial donations, and foundation gifts, many hospice programs are able to provide patients who lack insurance with free services. Other programs charge patients in accordance with their ability to pay.

A version of this article was published in the Oct. 12 edition of the Westchester County Business Journal.
**Letter from The Executive Director**

**EACH YEAR, HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE OF WESTCHESTER (HPCW)** continues to build on its legacy of being a vital member of Westchester’s healthcare community, providing quality end-of-life care that emphasizes compassion, dignity, and respect. Thanks to the inspiring leadership and dedication of our tireless staff, volunteers, board of directors, and supporters, we are pleased with what HPCW has been able to accomplish in its 23rd anniversary year, especially within the last few months.

HPCW is proud to share that it was once again named a Better Business Bureau (BBB) accredited nonprofit. HPCW was also found to be in full compliance with all the regulatory standards of Community Health Accreditation Partner (CHAP), receiving CHAP accreditation. These two achievements serve as a message to our donors and friends of our unwavering commitment to excellence.

We are also thrilled to report that the move to our new headquarters at 1025 Westchester Avenue in White Plains has been a smooth transition. The new location, offering added comfort, convenience and enhanced clinical capabilities, has been a tremendous success, welcomed by our patients, their families, and the local community.

The mandatory cuts to federal agencies that went into effect in 2013 continue to impact our bottom line. However, it is important to note that HPCW maintains its exceptional medical expertise provided to our patients and their families and the financial cuts have had no impact on the compassionate care we offer to our patients.

Each day, HPCW continues to make great strides and carry out its mission to provide extraordinary and dignified comfort, care, and compassion to individuals and families facing a serious or life-limiting illness. HPCW would not be able to deliver such high-level care without the continued support of individuals, corporate neighbors, and the Westchester community. We are eternally grateful to you—our donors—without whom we would not be able to enrich and expand our services year after year and continue to be recognized as the “Hospice of Choice” in Westchester County.

Thank you for your continued support and generosity. Our best wishes to you and your family for a peaceful and healthy holiday season! ☃

Mary K. Spengler, MS

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**VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES**

Our Volunteer Department is always seeking warm and compassionate individuals to volunteer with our patients and help in the office.

We will be offering an accelerated training opportunity for our Comfort Crew children’s bereavement support program. Two 5-hour Saturday sessions in November and December will be available to those interested, along with observation of our already active volunteer facilitators.

In the New Year, we will be offering training in vigil work, longer volunteer support in the last days/hours of a patient’s life. Our department is also currently working with HPCW’s Bereavement Department and Spiritual Care Department regarding skill enhancement opportunities in these areas for existing volunteers.

For further information, please call Bruce Page, Director of Volunteers, at 914-682-1484 ext. 118. ☃

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**BEREAVEMENT GROUPS**

**Fall/Winter Bereavement Support Groups**

- Daytime Spouse/Partner Loss
- Evening Parent/Sibling Loss
- “Flying Solo” spousal loss after a year (for women)
- Comfort Crew Child/Family Bereavement Program
- Coping With The Holidays workshop

Please contact our bereavement department for further information regarding dates, times and registration.

Karen Dreher, LCSW-R
Bereavement Coordinator
914-682-1484 ext. 130

Kim Gordon, CT
Bereavement Coordinator
914-682-1484 ext. 163

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**APPRECIATION TO FRIENDS AND SUPPORTERS OF HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE OF WESTCHESTER**

FOR 23 YEARS HPCW HAS SERVED AS AN INTEGRAL AND SOLID MEMBER OF THE WESTCHESTER COUNTY COMMUNITY by providing quality end-of-life care that emphasizes compassion, dignity and respect. We continue to rely on the dedication of you and other community members who have supported us throughout our history. Please continue this tradition by making a year-end, tax-deductible gift to HPCW using the enclosed envelope. For further information, please contact Holly K. Benedict, director of development and public relations, at 914-682-1484 ext. 122. Thank you again to you – our supporters – who have helped HPCW stay true to our mission and making us the “Hospice of Choice” in Westchester. ☃
NATIONAL HOSPICE & PALLIATIVE CARE MONTH

In 1992, the month of November was designated as National Hospice & Palliative Care Month, designed to raise awareness of hospice and palliative care within the community. The message shared throughout the month is that hospice care help patients and families focus on living. We are proud to have offered exceptional hospice programs and services to the Westchester County community for 23 years thanks to the generosity and support of our exceptional staff, volunteers, board of directors, supporters and friends.

Spring Soirée

On April 29, 2015, HPCW partnered with everyone’s favorite local restaurant, Sam’s of Gedney Way in White Plains, to welcome spring and raise funds to support our mission. Ten percent of the revenue generated throughout the evening was donated to HPCW and earmarked to support the organization’s vital programs and compassionate services.

L to R: Peter and Karen Herrero, owners, Sam’s of Gedney Way; Holly K. Benedict, director of development & public relations, HPCW; Mary K. Spengler, MS, executive director, HPCW; William F. Flooks, Jr., Chairman of the Board of Directors, HPCW

SAVE THE DATE

December 2, 2015
TREE OF LIFE

Friends, families and community members are invited to remember a loved one by purchasing a gold star in their memory. The evening also includes a reception with entertainment.

Hilton Westchester
5:30-7:00pm

For further information about the event or to make reservations, please call Holly K. Benedict at 914-682-1484 ext. 122.