



SUPPORTIVE CARE PEARLS

From Robert Sawicki, M.D., Medical Director of OSF Home Care Services

Can nursing home patients have hospice?

Absolutely! Unfortunately, 60% of patients who die in a nursing home have no idea that they could even have hospice services. Surveyors who audit nursing homes are beginning to emphasize the need to assure patients are receiving appropriate end of life care, including being offered the choice of hospice care.

How does this benefit my patients?

Hospice:

- Pays for medications related to the terminal illness
- Provides additional equipment needed
- Offers additional bathing and personal care by hospice aides
- Provides volunteers for companionship and support
- Provides pastoral care for spiritual support
- Delivers bereavement support to the family for 13 months
- Assists with pain and symptom management expertise

When does my patient need a hospice referral?

Common signs that nursing home patients are nearing the end of life include:

- Decline in functional status (can be quantified by various scales, including the FAST scale for patients with dementia, or Palliative Performance Scale for others)
- Weight loss
- Decline in mental status
- Increased pain
- Respiratory infections, aspiration, increased secretions
- Changes in GI functions such as dysphagia or development of ascites
- Weakness
- Increased incontinence
- Changes in vital signs and/or labs

How soon can my patient be admitted to hospice?

Hospice will meet with the family, explain the services, and coordinate the admission as soon as possible. It is not unusual for a nursing home patient to require 1 – 3 days to be admitted, primarily due to the time it takes to coordinate a visit with the family and make sure the person who can legally make decisions for the patient is available.

If a patient has not already designated a Power of Attorney for Healthcare but cannot make or express their own decisions, a surrogate must be designated. In the State of Illinois, two physicians must certify the patient's need for a surrogate.