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This resource was published  
prior to the change and so  
still refers to the old name

# What is hospice care?

## Answering questions about hospice care



## Introduction

If you, or someone close to you, have a life-limiting or terminal illness, you may have questions about the care you can get and what it involves. We want to answer those questions in this booklet.

We can also help you find out more about hospice care. Page 8 of this booklet tells you how to contact us if you have any other questions.



## What is hospice care?

Hospice care improves the lives of people who have a life-limiting or terminal illness. It helps them to live as actively as they can to the end of their lives, however long that may be. It not only takes care of people's physical needs, but looks after their emotional, spiritual and social needs as well. Hospice care also supports carers, family members and close friends, both during a person's illness and during bereavement. You may also hear it called palliative care.

Hospice care providers offer a range of services, which may include the following:

- pain and symptom control;
- psychological and social support;
- rehabilitation – helping patients to stay independent and continue to live their lives as they have done before;
- complementary therapies, such as massage and aromatherapy;
- spiritual care;
- family care;
- practical and financial advice;
- bereavement care.

These services are provided by a team of professionals with specialist training.



## Who can get hospice care?

Hospice care helps people with all sorts of illnesses, including cancer, heart failure and lung disease. People can use hospice care at any stage of their illness, not just at the very end of their life. There are hospices for adults, and for children and young people.

## 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 care homes can provide some palliative care. However, they will use a hospice or palliative care team when more specialist support is needed.



## Where is hospice care provided?

A hospice is not just a building – it is a way of caring for people. Hospices provide care in a number of different places including people's own homes, day care and inpatient units. Palliative care is also provided in hospitals and care homes.

### People's own homes

Many people want to be looked after 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 the following:

- advice on controlling pain and symptoms;
- practical advice;
- emotional support.

They work closely with GPs and district nurses.

Hospice at Home services allow people to receive hospice care in their own home. This may be care when someone is getting near to the end of their life, respite care (to give their carers a break), or it may just be care during a difficult time. Some teams can offer nursing care 24 hours a day.

Hospices and palliative care teams will provide support for carers in the community too (for example, through a support and information group or by giving them advice).

## Day care

Day care gives people the chance to spend time in a hospice without being admitted as an inpatient. This will allow them to get the care and support they need while living at home. The care and support offered includes the following:

- medical and nursing care;
- rehabilitation;
- creative therapies, such as art therapy and music therapy;
- complementary therapies.

Day care also gives people the chance to meet other people going through similar experiences.

## Inpatient units

Some people are admitted to a hospice or palliative care inpatient unit at an early stage of their illness for a short period of intensive care, for example 10 to 14 days, and they will then go home or to another care setting. It could be for rehabilitation after treatment, or to control their symptoms (for example, pain, nausea or vomiting). People may also be admitted to a hospice during the final stages of their illness.

## Hospital

There are palliative care teams that work in hospitals alongside other doctors and nurses, and other health and social care professionals. Their role is to support the hospital staff by providing education, training and specialist advice on controlling pain and symptoms. The team will also provide emotional support to patients and their carers, and will advise staff on planning for when people go 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.

## Do I have to pay for hospice care?

No. Hospice or palliative care is free for patients and their carers, family members and friends.

## Are hospices religious places?

Many hospices were started by religious organisations. However, hospices value the different cultures, faiths and life experiences of every individual and do their best to meet their needs.

## How can I get hospice care?

Your GP or a hospital doctor would usually refer you for hospice care. A district nurse may also refer you to a community palliative care nurse or a Hospice at Home service. You are usually referred to your nearest hospice or palliative care team, but in special circumstances you may be able to be referred to a care provider further away.



## How can I find out more about hospice care?

You can contact Help the Hospices for more information about hospice care. We are the leading charity supporting hospice care in the UK. We can tell you about the hospice care available in your area. You can go to our website at **[www.helpthehospices.org.uk](http://www.helpthehospices.org.uk)** or phone **020 7520 8222** for details of support organisations, including those for specific illnesses.

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