

## Hospice Care<sup>1</sup>

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Recently a friend's mother, Alice, was diagnosed with lung cancer, and even though she received all the possible treatments, the cancer was incurable. She went into hospice care so that she could get professional help in preparing herself and her family for her death.

Hospice programs are available in communities around the country "to help terminally ill individuals live their remaining days with dignity" (Administration on Aging,

2003, p. 1) while "surrounded by their loved ones" (Hospice Association of America, 1994, ¶ 1). Usually, hospice patients "are in their last six months of life" and the majority (about two-thirds) are over the age of 65 (Hospice Foundation of America, 2006, ¶ 2).

A hospice team "works with the patient and his or her family to develop a personalized care plan" (Hospice Foundation of America, 2006, ¶ 9) that will make "the patient as comfortable as possible" (Association on Aging, 2003, p. 1). Hospice care is usually provided in the patient's home with a family member giving most of the care, but hospice can also be at a special hospice residence, a nursing home, hospital, or long-term care facility (National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization).

Talking about death may be painful and difficult under any circumstances. "Counseling services for the patient and loved ones are an important part of hospice care" and can include visits, phone calls, support groups, and bereavement counseling and information after the patient's death (National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization). The hospice team is specially trained to provide not only medical assistance but also to help the patient

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and the family deal with the loneliness and fears that come as they face the end of life (Hospice Foundation of America, 2006).

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