Does Certified Hospice make a difference?

Hospice is a philosophy of care that focuses on improving the quality of life for people with an advanced illness. Hospice care becomes an option when patients, together with their families and their physicians, decide that future efforts to cure the illness are no longer feasible or desirable. Hospice care focuses on quality of life - in which the goals become living life more fully, more comfortably and more in control.

Can any good healthcare provider deliver the hospice philosophy of care? At Central New Hampshire VNA & Hospice, we are often asked that question. It is certainly true that any caring clinician can offer compassionate care, but we believe that hospice care delivered by a certified agency goes far beyond good intentions. Care offered by a certified hospice is delivered by a specialized team of skilled caregivers who address the medical, spiritual and emotional needs of the patient and, importantly, of their family. These caregivers – doctors, nurses, nursing assistants, nutritionists, social workers, spiritual care providers and volunteers – are all highly trained to understand and assist in managing quality of life concerns. This specialized care team works together to manage complex physical symptoms, to help in dealing with emotional issues, to guide financial questions and to explore spiritual beliefs and concerns. Importantly, the bereavement specialists also continue to work with the family for one year following the passing of a loved one, providing important support during the most difficult times.

Often as people approach the end of life, they are fearful: fearful of pain from an advancing disease, fearful of being a burden to their family, fearful of losing capacity and becoming dependent on others, fearful that they have not done enough in their lives. They sometimes need to come to peaceful closure in troubled relationships and to address and understand their lives in light of their spiritual beliefs. Certified hospice providers offer trained assistance in all those areas, and they are respectful of the patient and family’s unique needs and choices, always working toward the goal of quality of life. Certified hospice under Medicare and Medicaid also includes the provision of certain medications, treatments and medical equipment – which are not included under a general care umbrella.

When I speak to patients and families who are receiving hospice care, they are often struck by how relaxed it is and how much the care focuses on making the best of the time they have. They speak of the attention to both the medical and non-medical needs. They speak of the laughter shared and of the willingness to lend a shoulder to cry on. These are not the typical qualities of routine health care. That is why hospice is a very special service delivered by a very specialized team. The term “certified” hospice means that the team has met the criteria to offer all of these high quality services. It is not a label used lightly. Certification must be earned over time. So, when it is time for you or a loved one to consider the option of hospice, consider the depth and breadth of services offered by a certified hospice provider.

*Some language borrowed from Hospice Care of South Carolina.