The Truth About Hospice

For many people, “hospice care” has a fairly negative connotation — but is it really something to dread? Actually, most fears that people have regarding hospice are based on misconceptions rather than fact. So, what really is hospice care? ADVANCE is here to confront those mistruths and help you answer that question.

**BELIEF**

Hospice care is only for the elderly.

Hospice care is only offered in hospitals and retirement homes.

Hospice care forbids patients from receiving any other form of treatment.

Hospice care is the same as palliative care.

Hospice care is giving up.

**TRUTH**

Hospice care is not reserved for a single age group. Rather, it is for anyone who has received a prognosis of six months or less and a referral from a physician. While many hospice patients are older, anyone who meets these two requirements is able to enter hospice.

Hospice care is offered wherever the patient considers “home.” While this could be in a retirement home or assisted living facility, often hospice care is given in a patient’s own home or a family member’s home.

Hospice care is a program of care while palliative care is a philosophy of care. Palliative care is focused on symptom management and treatment and can be utilized by any individuals with life-threatening illnesses, regardless of prognosis. Hospice care programs contain palliative care, but are highly focused on comfort and are only offered to individuals who meet specific requirements. If a person has a prognosis of over six months, he cannot enter hospice care.

Although patients often remain in hospice care until the end of life, they do not have to. If a new treatment becomes available that the patient wants to try, he can decide to leave hospice and pursue that treatment. Hospice patients in such a position often make the decision to switch to palliative care instead.

Hospice care does not mean no longer fighting. Because it’s not binding, many patients do continue to look for new treatments even while in hospice. Regardless of whether or not a patient chooses to continue to pursue treatment, though, entering hospice does not mean defeat. It means allowing healthcare professionals to provide the patient and the patient’s family the assistance and comfort that they both need and deserve.

**SOURCES**

1. Heidi Corey, RN, BSN, clinical manager of the BAYADA hospice office in Rutland, Vt.
2. Kimberly Shea, PhD, RN, CHPN, clinical associate professor at the University of Arizona College of Nursing