

# Hospice Is More Than A Place

By Melissa Weidman

November is National Hospice and Palliative Care Month and hospices across the country are reaching out to raise awareness about the need for high quality care for those coping with life-limiting illness.

This year's theme is "Know Your Options!" It stresses the importance of people thinking about the care they would and would not want before they find themselves in a medical crisis and helps them to understand the value in planning for the care they might need if they were to face a serious or life-limiting illness. One of the most frequent comments hospice providers hear from families is "why did we wait so long before calling hospice?"

"Every year, nearly 1.6 million people living with a life-limiting illness receive care from hospice and palliative care providers in this country," says Diana Franchitto, president & CEO of HopeHealth, which serves southeastern Massachusetts and Rhode Island. "These highly trained professionals ensure that patients and families find dignity, respect and support during life's most challenging journey. Hospice is one of the best medical benefits in health care. And the best time to call is before there is a crisis."

Hospice is not a place, it's a comprehensive model of care. Hospice and palliative care programs provide pain management, symptom control, psychosocial support and spiritual care to patients and their families when a cure is not possible. Hospice and palliative care combine medical care with the emotional and spiritual support that families need most when facing the end of life.

The term hospice, from the same linguistic root as hospitality, can be traced back to medieval times when it referred to a place of shelter and rest for weary or ill travelers on a long journey. The name was first applied to specialized care for seriously ill patients by a physician, Dame Cicely Saunders, who created the first modern hospice – St. Christopher's Hospice—in London in 1967. In 1982, the U. S. Congress created the Medicare hospice benefit. Today, there are more than 6,000 hospice organizations across the country. Hope Hospice, founded in 1981, is one of the pioneers in New England.



Throughout the month of November, Hope Hospice will be joining organizations across the nation participating in activities that will help the community understand how important hospice and palliative care can be. They are providing copies of Five Wishes, a document designed to give people control over how they want to be treated if they get seriously ill. It's an easy-to-complete form that lets people say exactly what they want, and it is valid under the laws of most states once it's properly signed. Contact 800-642-2423 or [Info@HopeHealthCo.org](mailto:Info@HopeHealthCo.org) for a copy of Five Wishes.

**(Ms. Weidman is director of community relations and outreach for HopeHealth, 508-957-0200 or [MWeidman@HopeHealthCo.org](mailto:MWeidman@HopeHealthCo.org).)**