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• **Houston Solari Hospice Care**
• **NEWS RELEASE**
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**The Sooner, The Better
Hospice Works Best When Utilized Early**

Houston, Tex. – Jan. 23, 2012 – When is the right time to seek hospice intervention? It's a question that medical professionals at Houston Solari Hospice Care hear almost every day. While there's no easy answer, sooner is better.

"The earlier in the process patients get on a hospice service and get their pain under control, the more time everyone has to make important decisions," says Bren Hingle, executive director, Houston Solari Hospice Care. "Hospice care is not only for the patient, but also for the family. Deciding how to care for a loved one at the end of life is extremely stressful. Hospice services make for a smoother transition because there is time to adjust to all of the changes going on with the patients' health and family dynamics."

Yet, according to the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization's annual report, "Facts and Figures: Hospice Care in America," released earlier this month (January 2012), hospice stays are actually becoming shorter. The median length of service in 2010 was 19.7 days, a decrease from 21.1 days in 2009. Likewise, the average length of service dropped to 67.4 days in 2010 from 69 days in 2009.

"What's important to recognize here is that half of hospice patients received care for less than 20 days," says J. Donald Schumacher, NHPCO president and CEO. "With drops in both the median and average length of service, there is concern that hospice providers are not reaching the patients and family caregivers who need hospice support in a timely manner."

In 2010, 35.3 percent of patients died or were discharged within seven days of admission.

"It's very difficult for patients and families to take full advantage of the range of services hospice offers when they are under care for only a few days. We must be careful about turning a blind eye to the large number of patients dying in less than a week," states Schumacher.

Although the recommended guidelines for patients going on hospice is six months or less to live, Hingle agrees that all too often, referrals are not made until patients have uncontrolled symptoms or are near death. While hospice can certainly assist during these few critical days, patients and families can benefit much more when services are delivered earlier.

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“In our death-denying culture, there is a pervasive line of thinking that when patients have a terminal illness, they should fight until the end,” says Hingle. “Hospice is often viewed as giving up.”

However, recent findings published in such prestigious publications as the *New England Journal of Medicine* and the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* have actually shown that hospice care has numerous benefits that make the fighting easier.

“Statistically, studies have proven that patients who are taken care of by hospice – especially early in their terminal illness – have a better quality of life, suffer from less depression, have better management of pain symptoms, and in some circumstances even live longer,” explains Hingle.

Another major advantage to early hospice intervention is that patients and caregivers have an interdisciplinary team of people monitoring their plan of care and making adjustments daily if needed. Hospice can assist with medicines, medical equipment, bathing, dressing, and even help with completing a living will or medical power of attorney. Grief, bereavement and spiritual support is also free and available.

“Ultimately, patients have less hospitalization after they become part of a hospice program because the team approach helps identify small medical issues before they become big problems,” says Hingle. “The result is that patients can remain in their homes, or if the pain becomes unmanageable, in our comfortable new 12-bed Inpatient Home. We do everything we can to honor our patients’ and caregivers’ wishes and make every day count.”

Houston Solari Hospice Care, a member of the NHPCO, is devoted to helping people live with dignity and comfort by providing trusted and professional hospice care in the Houston and Las Vegas communities. Focused on enhancing the quality of life for patients and their loved ones, Solari’s exemplary team of physicians, pharmacists, registered nurses, certified nursing aides, social workers, administrative staff and counselors are specially trained to offer the most compassionate and comforting care designed for each patient’s unique needs. To learn more about Houston Solari Hospice Care, please visit www.solarihospice.com, e-mail info@solarihospice.net or follow @SolariHospice on Twitter or Facebook.

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