

# Helping Patients and Families to Choose the Best End-of-Life Care Option

Provided by Houston Solari Hospice

- **Educate yourself on local hospices.** Your doctor or local hospitals should be able to recommend hospice providers in your area. Be sure to take note whether the hospice providers you are considering also have inpatient hospice homes in the event that pain and symptoms become unmanageable and 24-hour care is needed.
- **Contact the hospices.** Compile a list of potential hospices to contact. Ask whether they are accredited, certified and licensed. If accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting body, such as the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations, the hospice has sought accreditation and is committed to providing quality care. State health departments certify hospices, guaranteeing that the facility meets safety and health regulations. Licensing requirements vary by state and are generally overseen by its respective health department.
- **Ask for and check references.** Ask for references from professionals, such as a hospital or community social workers. Talk with these people about their experiences. Also check with the Better Business Bureau or the State Attorney General's office to find out whether any complaints or lawsuits have been filed against the hospices on your list.
- **Inquire about a preliminary evaluation and plan of care.** As part of a patient's preliminary evaluation, a hospice should determine the types of services needed for the patient. The evaluation should contain what the patient can and can't do for themselves, consultation with family physicians already providing the patient with medical treatment and consultation with family members.
- **Discuss the treatment plan process.** After the preliminary evaluation, the hospice should develop a treatment plan that is carefully created with the patient and family and given to all service providers to ensure smooth coordination of care. The plan of care should be clearly written, with copies given to all loved ones involved. The plan should list specific duties, work hours and days, and contact information for the hospice care supervisor. Inquire how frequently the plan is reviewed and updated to accommodate any changing needs.
- **Learn about the hospice staff.** Hospice patients are cared for by an interdisciplinary team of doctors, nurses, social workers, counselors, clergy, volunteers and therapists. Ask about the patient-to-caregiver ratios to make sure that the right amount of care is received. Ask about the continuity of care to determine whether or not the patient will have the same caregivers. This insight can give an indication how satisfied the hospice staff is or if there is a high turnover rate.

FINAL PLANNING