



# What is the Difference between Palliative Care and Hospice Care?

## Getting The Right Care at the Right Time

[Palliative care](#) and [hospice care](#) are similar, but there are some key differences.

Both palliative care and hospice care are focused on the needs of the patient and their quality of life. Palliative care focuses on maintaining the highest quality of life while managing treatment and other needs. Hospice care specifically focuses on the period closest to death.

Knowing the specific differences between hospice and palliative care can help someone decide what level of care is best. If your health changes, the kind of care being received can be changed.

| Question   | Palliative Care  | Hospice Care  |
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| <b>What is the focus?</b>                        | Palliative care focuses on easing pain and discomfort, reducing stress, and helping people have the highest quality of life possible.          | Hospice care focuses on quality of life when a cure is no longer possible, or the burdens of treatment outweigh the benefits.   |
| <b>Who can receive this type of care?</b>        | Palliative care is a resource for anyone living with a serious illness.  | People can be enrolled in the hospice Medicare benefit if their doctor thinks they have fewer than six months to live. The benefit may be extended multiple times if a physician certifies. Hospice services are also offered to persons with Medicaid or private insurance. Talk to your doctor if you think a hospice program might be helpful. |
| <b>Can I still get treatment for my illness?</b> | You can receive palliative care while also receiving curative and therapeutic care for an illness, such as chemotherapy, dialysis, or surgery. | You will not receive curative treatment for your specific illness, but you will receive medicine that enhances quality of life, such as treatment for high blood pressure or anxiety.   |

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| <p><b>What does this type of care include?</b></p> | <p>Palliative care services may include pain and symptom management, care coordination with your healthcare team, assistance with developing your plan of care, help with insurance forms and options for care and housing, help with advance directives, and spiritual care.</p> | <p>Hospice care includes pain and symptom management, emotional support, medications and medical supplies, coaching for caregivers, grief support, and may include special services like speech and physical therapy when needed. Medicare qualified hospices must provide a 24/7 call service.</p> <p>Hospice care will also make short-term inpatient care available when pain or symptoms become too difficult to manage at home or when caregivers need respite time.</p> |
| <p><b>Where can I get this type of care?</b></p>   | <p>Palliative care may be provided in any care setting, such as the home, a hospital, nursing homes, and outpatient clinics.</p>  | <p>Hospice care can be provided wherever the patient lives, including nursing facilities and long-term care facilities.</p>   |
| <p><b>Who provides this type of care?</b></p>      | <p>Most palliative care is provided by a specially trained team of doctors, nurses, and other specialists. They will work with your primary care doctor and specialists.</p>  | <p>Hospice care is provided by a team that focuses on the patient's needs. The team usually includes clergy, home health aides, hospice physicians, nurses, social workers, trained volunteers, and other specialized therapists if needed. A patient's personal physician may also be included.</p> <p>Although hospice provides a lot of support, if the patient lives at home, the day-to-day care is provided by the inner circle or paid home health aides.</p>          |

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| <p><b>Who pays for this type of care?</b></p>           | <p>Medicare, Medicaid, and many insurance plans will cover the medical portions of palliative care. Veterans may be eligible for palliative care through the VA. Check with your doctor and insurance to see what will be covered in your situation.</p> | <p>Hospice care is most often paid for as a benefit of Medicare. Hospice may also be paid for as part of a Medicare Advantage plan, by state Medicaid plans, or by private insurance. Discuss the source of payment and services covered with your hospice team.</p>  |
| <p><b>How long can I receive this type of care?</b></p> | <p>Palliative care can be provided as long as it's needed. Talk to your doctor about what level of care might be best for you as your health changes.</p>  | <p>Hospice care can be initiated and continued so long as your doctor believes you likely have fewer than six months to live.</p> <p>Sometimes, people receiving hospice care live longer than six months and the care can be extended. You can get hospice care for two 90-day benefit periods, followed by an unlimited number of 60-day benefit periods.</p> <p>It is also possible to leave hospice care if a patient's condition improves or they decide they wish to resume curative care and return to hospice care later.</p> |

Share this information with others and talk about what is most important to you. Get help knowing how to talk about what is important to you at [caringinfo.org](http://caringinfo.org).

It can be helpful to talk with someone who is familiar with palliative care and hospice care services to figure out what might be best for you or someone you are caring for. Your community hospice can be a helpful place to start.

If you need help finding a local hospice, [use the "Find a Provider" search tool on NHPCO.org](#).