
National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization

Research Shows Patients May Live Longer with Hospice and Palliative Care

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NHPCO Reminds People They Can Ask Physicians for Palliative Care

(Alexandria, Va) – A new study released by the *New England Journal of Medicine* found that among patients with non-small-cell lung cancer, those who received palliative care lived, on average, almost two months longer than those who received standard care. Researchers also found that the patients receiving palliative care reported a higher quality of life through the final course of their illness.

The goals of palliative care are to improve the quality of a seriously ill person's life and to support that person and their family during and after treatment. Sharing the same philosophy of hospice care which is usually provided in the final months of life, palliative care may be provided at any stage during a serious or life-limiting illness.

Researchers also found that when patients received palliative care services, they were also more likely to elect hospice services.

"With earlier referral to a hospice program, patients may receive care that results in better management of symptoms, leading to stabilization of their condition and prolonged survival," wrote the authors of the study released Wednesday in the *New England Journal of Medicine*.

This new study adds to the body of evidence showing that many patients live longer with hospice and palliative care.

A 2007 study that looked at Medicare beneficiaries with some of the most common diagnoses leading to death, found that patients who received hospice services lived on average, 29 days longer than those who did not receive hospice care. This study, published in the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* (March 2007) looked at 4,493 terminally ill patients with either congestive heart failure or cancer of the breast, colon, lung, pancreas, or prostate.

In an earlier study looking at patients with 16 of the most common terminal diagnoses, researchers found that hospice patients lived longer. On average, this ranged from 20 days for those with a diagnosis of gallbladder cancer to 69 days for the cohort of breast cancer patients (*JPSM*, September 2004).

"There's an inaccurate perception among the American public that hospice means you've given up," said J. Donald Schumacher, president and CEO of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. "Those of us who have worked in the field have seen firsthand how hospice and palliative care can improve the quality of and indeed prolong the lives of people receiving care."

NHPCO encourages all families who are diagnosed with a serious illness to ask their healthcare providers about hospice and palliative care services.

"The time to learn about these services is before a person is in a medical crisis. Patients and families must learn about these options of care as soon as possible," Schumacher added.

Both hospice and palliative care focus on helping a person with a serious or life-limiting illness by addressing issues causing physical or emotional pain, or suffering. Hospice and other palliative care providers have teams of people working together to provide care.

More information about hospice and palliative care is available online at www.caringinfo.org or by calling the HelpLine at 800-658-8898.

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NHPCO is the oldest and largest nonprofit membership organization representing hospice and palliative care programs and professionals in the United States. NHPCO's mission is to lead and mobilize social change for improved care at the end of life, www.nhpco.org.

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