

Hospice Volunteers: Helping People LIVE

Hospice volunteers provide companionship to people living with a serious illness and help their family caregivers in a variety of ways. Hospices also rely on volunteers to help with office work, fund raising, community outreach and other operational areas.

Hospice Needs Volunteers

Volunteers provide important services to hospice organizations and the people they serve. Whether it's providing companionship to a person in the final months and weeks of life, offering support to family members and caregivers, or helping with community outreach, the contributions of volunteers are essential to the important work provided by our nation's hospice programs.

Every hospice relies on volunteer support to provide excellent end-of-life care to each patient and family. By being a hospice volunteer, you can gain great personal satisfaction from knowing that you have made an impact in another person's life.

Hospice Helps People Live

Considered to be the model for quality, compassionate care for people facing a life-limiting illness or injury, hospice and palliative care involve a team-oriented approach to expert medical care, pain management, and emotional and spiritual support expressly tailored to the patient's needs and wishes. Support is provided to the patient's loved ones as well.

The focus of hospice relies on the belief that each of us has the right to live and die pain-free and with dignity, and that our loved ones will receive the necessary support to allow us to do so. The hospice team provides support to ensure the highest quality of life possible for the person living with a life-limiting illness.

- Hospice focuses on caring, not curing and, in most cases, care is provided in the patient's home.
- Hospice care also is provided in freestanding hospice centers, hospitals, nursing homes and other long-term care facilities.
- Hospice services are available to patients of any age, religion, race, or illness.
- Hospice care is covered under Medicare, Medicaid, most private insurance plans, HMOs, and other managed care organizations.

Hospice Trains Volunteers

All volunteers receive training to ensure they feel comfortable with their tasks. Training programs vary in length and generally cover the following areas:

- Philosophy of hospice care.
- A comprehensive overview of services offered by the hospice.
- Physical, emotional, social and spiritual issues that people can encounter at the end of life.
- Individual needs, including emotional support, emergency procedures, universal precautions and procedures to follow after the hospice patient dies.
- An overview of chronic and life-limiting illnesses.
- Effective communication skills when speaking with the patient and family members.
- Information about interpersonal family issues and relationships.
- Boundaries for the hospice volunteer and the patient and family.
- Basic information about grief and loss.

Hospice Volunteers Can Do . . . Just About Anything!

As a hospice volunteer you will be given choices as to how much and what types of things you want to do. Some examples of typical volunteer duties are:

- Listening to a patient's concerns.
- Being a comforting and supportive presence.
- Engaging in the patient's hobbies, for example, playing a board game or discussing current events.
- Telling other hospice staff the needs of the hospice patient and family.
- Running errands or doing light housekeeping for the patient and family.
- Encouraging the patient to tell their life story.
- Providing time for the caregiver to take care of her/his self.

Volunteers are never asked to do something they are not comfortable doing.

Hospice Volunteers Work in the Office Too!

Hospice relies on volunteers to help with administrative work as well. These duties include:

- Data entry
- Mailings and photocopying
- Filing

Who Can Volunteer?

Every hospice program has their own policy regarding eligibility for becoming a hospice volunteer. Many hospices work with volunteers in their teens. Emotional maturity plays an important role in determining whether or not a person is ready to become a hospice volunteer, as the role of a volunteer can be an intense experience.

During the initial interview, you may be asked the following questions:

- Why you want to become a hospice volunteer.
- What times you are available during the day to volunteer.
- Any experience/s that you may have had caring for family members or friends at the end of life.

The hospice staff person will ask you to complete an application and may also request that you provide a current resume and references. After you complete the hospice training as required by the hospice program you will be ready for your work as a hospice volunteer to begin!



NATIONAL HOSPICE AND PALLIATIVE CARE ORGANIZATION

Support for this Web site was provided by a grant from The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, Princeton, New Jersey.

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