

Myths, misconceptions surround hospice care

Hospice. You know the term. You probably even know someone who has received hospice care. Yet many misconceptions about hospice services are common according to Hospice of the North Shore (HNS), which has been providing end-of-life care for more than 25 years, making it the most experienced hospice program in the region.

Death and dying are topics that are difficult for Americans. Invariably, though, people express a wish to be in control of their lives, especially when they are facing a terminal illness.

Unfortunately, because they shun the topic, many Americans don't know the facts that can put them in control of their own care. Coping with a serious or terminal illness is a very difficult experience, not just for the patient but for all the loved ones involved.

Myth—Hospice is only for cancer patients: Hospice services are open to any individual with a life expectancy of six months or less, regardless of

their illness. Cancer patients make up a little less than half of the people served by HNS. Increasingly, hospices serve families coping with the end-stages of such chronic diseases as heart disease and Alzheimer's.

Myth—Hospice means giving up hope: Families that have received hospice services will tell you that hospice fosters a tremendous amount of hope. HNS staff help people revise what they may hope for, such as hope for living each day as fully as possible surrounded by family and friends. The gift of hospice is its capacity to help families see how much can be shared at the end-of-life through personal, emotional and spiritual connections.

Myth—People should wait until the last days of life before they choose hospice care: The earlier that people receive hospice care, the more effective it can be.

Too often patients and families suffer needlessly with pain, emotional distress and other issues thinking

that they are not ready for hospice yet.

Myth—Hospice is a place, so you must leave home to receive hospice services: Most hospice care is provided to patients in their own homes, however many patients live in nursing homes or assisted living facilities. HNS provides care in patients' homes, over 40 area nursing homes and assisted living facilities, hospice units in area hospitals, and (beginning in mid-2005), at the Hospice House at 78 Liberty Street in Danvers.

If you have questions about hospice services and end-of-life care, please call Hospice of the North Shore at 978.774.7566 or visit the website at www.hns.org. There are free handouts and materials that can help you understand hospice and your options more fully.

Right at Home is a new support vendor working with Hospice of the North Shore. If you have any questions regarding homecare call 978.232.0202 or see www.right-at-homemass.net.



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