

# XB Times

## Hospice Care

Hospice care is a valuable Medicare benefit that is misunderstood by many people. I'll spend a little time here today outlining some of the benefits of hospice, and how it can help patients and family members.

Hospice is designed for illnesses for which a cure is not possible, and in order to qualify for hospice, a doctor has to certify that the patient has six months or less to live if the disease progresses normally. The doctor will base this on his or her experience with other, similar patients. If the patient lives longer than six months, they can still remain on hospice services as they gradually decline in condition. Some patients even do so well with the increased care of hospice that they may be discharged from the hospice until they need services again.

Hospice care can be provided in a variety of settings: home, assisted living, or even a nurs-

ing home. Another requirement of hospice is that, in most cases the patient must have an identified caregiver. If a patient is living at home alone, the patient and the situation is assessed by the nurse and hospice team. Arrangements *may* be made so that the patient can continue to live alone for a period of time, but a specific written agreement is made upon admission that states that when the person can no longer care for himself/herself, a designated family member, friend or paid caregiver will be in the home 24 hours a day. If this is not feasible, then the patient agrees in writing to move to a designated assisted living or nursing home. The patient is informed at the time of the initial plan that if he or she moves to a nursing home, hospice will not pay for room and board, so the patient will either have to pay privately, or apply for Medicaid.

Hospice will provide

any medical equipment that is needed, such as a hospital bed, oxygen or a wheelchair, and they will also provide medications related to the hospice diagnosis. Other valuable benefits include ongoing nursing care, home health aides, social work services and chaplain services. These services can be a tremendous support to a family. Additionally, hospice provides a year of bereavement services for the family following the patient's death.

The focus if hospice is not only patient, but the family. When a patient goes on hospice, the focus of medical care shifts from cure to quality of life, allowing nature to take it's course and providing symptom management and comfort. Instead of taking the hospice patient to the hospital for aggressive treatment of a non-curable condition, the symptoms are managed at home in a comfortable environment, with medical support available.

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#### DID YOU KNOW?

- *Between 1990 and 2002 cancer as the primary hospice diagnosis dropped from 76% to 43%*
- *The median length of stay in hospice was 15 days in 2004*

### Thank you

Many thanks to Nancy Ritts, MSN, RN for adding valuable insight and information to this article

## Cordy Davila, Legal Assistant

Cordy Davila is the newest member of our team at Katten & Benson. Cordy is often the first person you talk to when you call the office.

Cordy is a Fort Worth native. She has previous legal experience, working as a legal assistant for Johnson, Vaughn & Heiskell, and later for Jim and Bill Lane.

She took a break from law to raise her four children. Even then she didn't slow down, and worked part time as a fitness instructor and personal trainer.

Cordy and her husband Sam both enjoy outside activities, such as running marathons, and this past winter Cordy not only skied, but learned to snowboard!



*Cordy Davila, Legal Assistant*

## Upcoming Katten & Benson Events

### April 14, 2009

Steve will be a speaker at the Hogstel Symposium at TCU

Kim will do a presentation on housing issues for the Caregiver Support Group at Harris HEB

### April 21, 2009

Janice will do a presentation on Medicaid for the Hospice and Palliative Nurse Association

### April 24, 2009

Katten & Benson is hosting the Business Development meeting from 8:30-10:00 am in the Community Room at Central Market, 4651 West Freeway, Fort Worth, TX 76107

For more information about any of these events, or to schedule a speaker, please call us at 817-263-5190