

Hospice

# Caring for the Terminally Ill Patient With a Personalized Plan

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Hospice-based care has seen substantial growth over the past few years thanks to new operational models, improved use of healthcare data and increasing public awareness.<sup>1</sup> For many hospice agencies, however, the emerging complexity around compliance documentation - combined with evolving pandemic pressures - has highlighted the need for increased personalization with the Plan of Care and services provided.

Here are four ways hospices can better prioritize and provision personalized care for terminally ill patients.

## 1) Start an Open Dialogue With the Patient

According to the CDC, fewer than 50 percent of terminally ill patients had an advance directive describing their end-of-life wishes in their medical records. And even with the directive on file, 65 to 76% of medical professionals weren't aware of its existence.<sup>2</sup>

Several factors conspire to create these conditions. The CDC report calls out denial and confusion as two of the most common — patients and care providers are often reluctant to acknowledge an imminent end to life, but also recognize the value provided by a seasoned hospice team for both patients and their families in creating the conditions for a peaceful transition.



As a result, the first step in truly personalized care is communication: Having an honest conversation about end-of-life timelines and the specific hospice services patients may want to receive successfully in order to meet their end-of-life wishes. Creating space for open-ended

conversations can allow patients to ask any questions they may have, and also ensure misconceptions are discussed and addressed, alleviating additional stress or anxiety.

## 2) Follow Appropriate Frameworks for End-of-Life Care

Advance directives offer a framework for end-of-life care — but provide little benefit if they're not followed. This is especially critical as many families are now unable to see loved ones on a regular basis thanks to pandemic social distancing protection plans. In turn, family members must have the confidence that hospice staff are equipped to deliver directive requests as required.

It's worth noting that palliative care personalization demands effective documentation. Hospice staff need purpose-built, streamlined software capable of quickly and accurately collecting patient care preferences, and then storing this information in secure medical records. To ensure these frameworks are followed, hospice clinicians also need a way to access these records anytime, anywhere, in turn allowing them to spend as much time with patients as possible — instead of searching for documents.

## 3) Take on a Patient-Focused Approach

Hospice professionals play a critical role in a patient's end-of-life experience. By forging familiarity with a patient-focused approach to palliative processes, it's possible for hospice staff to improve personalization and enhance overall quality of care.

Research suggests that three factors are critical for personalization: Treating the whole person, making the patient feel special and considering the patient's social situation.<sup>3</sup> For most hospice clinicians, these compassionate considerations come naturally: They're committed to providing the best care for their patients.



Unfortunately, efforts at whole-person palliative care are often frustrated by systems designed for other medical applications and then adapted hospice work. Tools such as [Optima Hospice](#), meanwhile, provide access to one-screen assessments and plans of care combined with pre-populated, interdisciplinary forms to help hospice staff deliver the whole-person care their patients need.

*Hope Healthcare and Hospice is spending more time with patients and their families by using Optima Hospice.*  
[Read the case study!](#)

#### **4) Facilitate Follow-Ups With Families**

The work of hospice agencies doesn't cease with end-of-life. Follow-up is also critical with patients' families, both immediately after the fact and at regular intervals up to 13 months following the death of the hospice patient. In turn, this helps hospice staff connect with the families and caregivers around topics of grief and healing, as well as provide further support if needed.

The challenge? With massive amounts of paperwork required for each patient combined with a substantive amount of manual data entry tasks, it's easy for follow-ups to get lost in the shuffle. Automated medical software solutions can help hospice staff stay on track with data-driven reminders to follow up with the bereaved family members and extend the impact of personalized care.

Terminally ill patients and their families often face significant physical, emotional and financial challenges. Personalized palliative care can create compassionate connections to help hospice agencies ease these end-of-life burdens.