

What Are You Waiting For? The PROVEN BENEFITS of EARLY HOSPICE INTERVENTION

By Lorraine C. Lordi, VNA Hospice Volunteer

This past November, my elderly mother required two extended hospitalizations due to COPD flare-ups and intestinal bleeding. Her discharge orders specified rehabilitation in a medical nursing facility so she could receive oxygen and treatments for her breathing.

“But I don’t want to go to some strange place,” my mom pleaded. “Please let me go back to my own home.”

I, too, wanted her back in her own place. My mom raised seven children, worked and volunteered, and valued independence her whole life. She belonged at home. But how was that possible when she suffered from a severe illness and needed continuous medical care?

On a bleak, rainy night, I did comply with doctor’s orders and brought Mom to a nearby nursing facility. I placed her favorite stuffed puppy dog next to her and held her hand until she fell asleep. Her mouth dropped open. Dried teardrops creased her pale, sunken cheeks.

Leaving my mother there that night was the hardest things I’ve ever done. After struggling with a tearful night myself, I awoke and realized that Mom could indeed come back to her home where memories and friends brought her joy and comfort. Under the care of her own hospice team, she could remain in her home and let the medical hospitality come to her!

Sadly, few doctors today, including my mom’s physicians, suggest hospice care unless a patient has a terminal illness like cancer with few days left to live. As a trained hospice volunteer, though, I knew otherwise. A person doesn’t have to have terminal cancer or be on her deathbed in order to receive the many healing services hospice offers.



In fact, according to the *New England Journal of Medicine* (2010), when severely ill patients (with chronic conditions like heart disease, COPD, and dementia) receive hospice care early on, they experience less depression, and they improve mentally, emotionally, and physically. In fact, patients under early hospice care live 25% longer due to better management of symptoms by a team of doctors, nurses, aides, volunteers, social workers, and spiritual directors united around one special person.

My mother, who is now home with hospice care, is living proof of that. Two months ago, she could barely get out of her bed. She was caught in a depression so deep that stories of her precious great-grandchildren couldn’t make her smile. She even stopped listening to her books on tape.

Now, though, after six weeks of undivided attention from her hospice team, Mom’s transformation is remarkable. Miraculous, you could say. She is up and walking again, often without oxygen. She can cook her own favorite meals. Best of all, Mom is smiling again. Whenever we call or visit, she can’t wait to tell us about the daily adventures from her “wonderful new family” – her hospice team.

I realize my mom is still dying. But now, it isn’t the presence of death that shrouds the room. It’s the blessing of life. So I urge you: If you have a loved one suffering from a chronic, severe illness, please don’t wait. They deserve the compassion, care, and comfort that hospice offers – and so do you.

Remember how I mentioned that my mom smiles now? Well, thanks to my mom’s amazing hospice team, I’m smiling again, too!

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