

Hospice Eligibility Guidelines for Persons with Dementia

Frequently, the staff and volunteers that man the Helplines of the Alzheimer's Association—Michigan chapters, the Michigan Parkinson's Foundation, and the Huntington's Disease Society—Michigan Chapter, are asked questions about what services are available to assist those caring for individuals in the advanced stages of dementia. One service that is many times over looked by family caregivers and health care professionals is Hospice Care. Unfortunately, many generally perceive that hospice care is only available for those that have cancer. However, Hospice is not limited to cancer patients. It is for any patient with a limited life expectancy such as those in late stage heart, lung, liver or kidney disease as well as those with progressive neurological illnesses like Alzheimer's and Parkinson's diseases who meet certain criteria.

Hospice care is a team approach to end of life care that provides palliative medical care, nursing care, spiritual care, social worker, bereavement and other support services to those with a life-limiting illness and their families. Hospice care focuses on providing care and comfort instead of curing the life-limiting illness. This care is provided in the home, in a nursing facility, or in a community-based hospice location.

Persons being considered for hospice care need to meet eligibility guidelines determined by Medicare. These guidelines, called **LMRPs** (Local Medical Review Policy) take into account severity of disease and degree of impairment. Persons in the early and middle stages of dementia may have many needs, and technically are "incurable," but do not meet the guidelines necessary to be considered at the end of life or "terminal."

Hospice Eligibility Guidelines:

To be enrolled in hospice, ALL of these signs and symptoms must be present:

- Unable to walk without direct assistance
- Unable to dress themselves
- Need help for bathing and grooming
- Unable to control bowel and bladder
- Might use some language, but are unable to converse effectively

They must also have experienced at least ONE of the following in the last year:

- Serious lung or kidney infection
- Sepsis (sometimes called "blood poisoning")
- Severe open bedsores or pressure ulcers
- Persistent fever, even after antibiotics
- Consistent inability to take food/fluids, or, lab test results that indicate profound nutritional impairment

It is recommended that the majority of the guidelines apply to patients before they enter a hospice program. However, there may be exceptions to this guideline and each individual should be evaluated. Many community physicians are unfamiliar with LMRP guidelines, however, your local hospice provider knows them and can advise you and your doctor on eligibility questions, as well as other issues related to end-of-life care. For a listing of Hospice Care Programs in you area, contact the Alzheimer's Association at 800-337-3827.

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