

Knowing When to Call Hospice

By Emmanuel Hospice

At 96-years-old, Betty Piepenbrink was struggling with daily tasks, and those closest to her worried she may be nearing the end of her life. She lived alone, yet family agonized over her safety and her health. Tired, she was ready to die and struggled to find meaning –and that’s when her grandson called Emmanuel Hospice.

A team for Emmanuel Hospice conferred with Piepenbrink and her family, stepping in to ensure she was taking her medications, eating properly and socializing as she was able. Eventually, Piepenbrink moved to Pilgrim Manor where she resides today.

For Piepenbrink and her family, like many others, the decision of when to call hospice isn’t always clear. It often involves a difficult conversation with family, prompting the need to confront perhaps unpleasant realities. Many see the call as giving up, which makes a tough decision even tougher.

“A person doesn’t need to be hours or days from death for us to be the right next step,” said Jennifer Radaz, Emmanuel Hospice admissions coordinator and hospital liaison. “In fact, it is often more effective to understand our services before you need them by gathering information about what hospice is and does.

“We want to provide information so that when the time comes, it’s an easier decision to make that call.”

Hospice services are for those who have been given a life expectancy of six months or less. They have decided to discontinue treatment or may no longer have treatment options available. Their day-to-day focus shifts from a cure to comfort.

Emmanuel Hospice assembles a team which includes doctors, nurses, social workers, spiritual care counselors, and home health aides for each patient team. These teams may also include a dietitian and volunteers. Ancillary services such as acupuncture, acupressure, music therapy and massage therapy are available to support a patient’s needs.

“There can be a stigma associated with calling hospice, but for many patients and families, it’s a welcome support,” Radaz explained. “Hospice provides comprehensive care and support for patients so they and their families can make the most of their remaining time. This often gives them the freedom and the ability to remain in the place they call home with support from an entire team.”

Hospice offers many benefits that ease a patient’s end-of-life transition.

- **Personalized care** in the patient’s home when his or her condition allows. Hospice gives patients access to experienced hospice and palliative care doctors and nurses, all of whom work together to provide a plan specific to the needs of the patient. Hospice provides care 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year.
- **Pain and symptom management**, which is designed to maximize comfort for the terminally ill by reducing pain and addressing body, mind and spirit.
- **Specialized therapies**, including massage therapy, music therapy and pet therapy that can help make the patient comfortable.

- **Spiritual services**, designed to nurture the spirit not matter what a patient’s faith tradition. As a faith-based hospice, Emmanuel Hospice offers spiritual advisors who can assist families in the challenges –and joys– found in the end-of-life transition.
- **Caregiver support**, such as providing volunteers to help with bathing and dressing, companionship or meal preparation. Volunteers and staff can offer stressed caregivers the opportunity to run errands or recharge their batteries by ensuring their loved one is cared for in their absence.
- **Grief counseling**, which is provided to family members before, during and after a loss. Many hospice providers, like Emmanuel Hospice, can offer one-on-one counseling, end-of-life planning and support groups for loved ones.

All hospice providers are unique, Radaz noted, and it’s important to find one that understands what the patient and family want their end-of-life care to look like –and what they want to accomplish.

“We always start the conversation with ‘How do you want to live?’” she said. “From there, we can develop a personalized plan of care for the individual and family.

“For many, it’s as simple as spending time pain-free with family and making the most of their remaining time. They want to enjoy the rest of their life with their families – that’s their goal and ours: to live the end of their life on their terms.”

Others, like Betty Piepenbrink, dream of re-engaging with a lifelong passion. For Piepenbrink, that was golf. When her Emmanuel Hospice care team learned that she loved the links, they arranged for a special VIP day where Piepenbrink and her nurse could attend the Meijer LPGA Classic for Simply Give.

She was chauffeured to Blythefield Country Club in style, thanks to a limousine donate by Dadd’s Magic Bus & Limousine. Event sponsor Meijer arranged for a golf cart and clubhouse access. A highlight for Piepenbrink was meeting Lexi Thompson, who was course leader the day she visited. Thompson spent time with Piepenbrink, sharing the experience later on Instagram and Twitter.

“I was at that stage that I was just waiting to die,” Piepenbrink said. “Until that golf outing, I wished it was today. That trip was like a dream, and gave me something to live for.”

Though the subject may be difficult to approach and many people might not know where to start, gathering information about hospice to make informed decisions could simply put your mind at ease. If you need help, Emmanuel Hospice can assist. Visit www.emmanuelhospice.org for more information.