

## Hospice – a wise decision for Jimmy Carter

**By Stephanie Abel-Hohenzy**  
**shohenzy@cvhospice.org**

Recently you may have heard former president Jimmy Carter and his family opted for hospice care after a series of short hospital stays because he chose to forgo additional curative treatments and was growing tired of making continual trips to the hospital. Instead, with the support of his family, they can focus on spending quality time with each other knowing he's getting excellent care in his own home.

When people hear the word hospice, they often think "death." It's a healthcare service many don't want to talk about because they don't fully understand the benefits of utilizing this type of care.

The first hospice was opened in the United States in 1974, only five years shy of Carter becoming president and Cedar Valley Hospice opening its doors to families in 1979. Hospice services were made available across the country in 1982 by a federal bill that made it a Medicare benefit, according to the National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization.

Starting a conversation about healthcare options when you or someone you love has a serious illness is difficult. From managing doctor's appointments, medications and bills to trying to muster the strength to make it through the day – it can be overwhelming. At Cedar Valley Hospice, our experts understand those pressures a serious illness can put on a family and are an excellent resource for answering tough questions.

### **What is hospice?**

Hospice is a successful model of person-centered care that brings comfort, dignity and compassion to a patient wherever they call home. Every person's journey is different and all receive an individualized healthcare plan carried out by their own team. At Cedar Valley Hospice that team consists of: a doctor, nurse, social worker, health aide, spiritual care counselor, music therapist, volunteer and grief counselor. These providers are specialty trained and come together to provide a circle of support who are available when you need them.

We can enhance the communication between patients and their healthcare providers, offer personalized care in the comfort of your own surroundings and improve the quality of life for everyone involved. A nurse is available 24/7, which helps reduce stress and

hospitalizations. Services are fully covered by Medicare, Medicaid and most private insurances; however, at Cedar Valley Hospice, no one is turned away for inability to pay.

“When Cedar Valley Hospice visited my mother in her home, she would smile all the time,” said Tracie Spencer, daughter. “Their extra support allowed our family to exhale and just spend precious time with her. They truly are like guardian angels.”

### **Why choose hospice care?**

People often say, “I’m not ready for hospice.” Sadly, far too many hospice patients and their families don’t elect hospice soon enough. Hospice is not only for your final days or weeks – this is one of many hospice myths (see more in the Myth vs. Fact graphic). Typically, hospice benefits can be elected when two physicians certify that a patient has 6 months or less to live if their disease follows normal timelines.

At Cedar Valley Hospice, we often see patients’ symptoms improve once they begin receiving hospice care. This is often credited to excellent symptom management; a team providing support and the decrease in overall stress knowing your health is being monitored by experts.

Hospice Care may be right for you if:

- Recurring hospital visits/stays are becoming more frequent
- Pain and symptoms are more difficult to manage.
- Family needs assistance with in-home care.
- You have decided to no longer seek curative treatment.

### **Not ready for hospice? Palliative care may be for you.**

Palliative care is geared toward those with a serious illness, regardless of life expectancy or prognosis. Care is provided by a nurse and social worker who visit you at home and offer support and guidance. Those who choose palliative care can still be seeking curative treatment. Examples of diagnoses include: COPD, heart disease, dementia and cancer.

Palliative Care may be right for you if:

- A life-limiting diagnosis is made.
- You are looking for guidance on treatment options.
- Symptoms have become more difficult to manage.
- Patient is experiencing significant changes in independence.

### **Your Choice. Your Home. Your Life.**

The best time to learn about hospice or palliative care is before you are faced with a medical crisis. One of the most frequent comments we hear from families we’ve served is, “We wish we would have called sooner?”

Remember, making the choice to call Cedar Valley Hospice can turn a difficult situation into one that is manageable. Your health priorities are Cedar Valley Hospice's priorities. It is never too soon to call and see how we can help. Call us today at 319-352-1274 or 800-626-2360.