

# Media Release

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## **Choosing hospice to extend quality of life Dispelling some of the myths about hospice care**

A Dec. 27, 2009 *New York Times* article asked whether choosing hospice care results in fewer choices for patients and families and may even hasten death. But the purpose of providing quality hospice care is to extend the quality of life by giving people choices and honoring their wishes. What happens when families feel cared for and respected during this challenging time is remarkable:

- Hospice care relieves patients' pain and other symptoms so that they can feel stronger and more comfortable. This often means they are better able to communicate their wishes, enjoy spending time with their family and friends, and remain active for as long as possible. Many of our patients continue to do what matters most to them. An artist kept working at her craft; a cancer patient continued to ride his golf cart to visit with his neighbors and check on their health. Another patient took the time to found a library in her small town.

"The most rewarding words I hear are, 'Doc, I have no pain,'" says Haven physician Dr. Bob McCollough. "We've turned things around for so many patients. There's so much you can do for people at the end of their lives to make them comfortable and pain-free."

- Hospice physicians care for patients wherever they are most comfortable—at home, in a skilled nursing facility or in the hospital, surrounded by their loved ones and the staff who are caring for them.
- Hospice patients are able to die naturally, in their own time, when they are ready to go. Many hospice patients live longer than expected because hospice care eases mental, physical, emotional and spiritual pain. A recent study of nearly 5,000 terminally ill patients revealed that patients in hospice care live an average of 29 days longer than patients who have similar conditions but are not receiving hospice care. Published in the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management*, the study's findings challenge the notion that hospice care hastens death.

"We have speculated for a long while that terminally ill patients do better while in hospice care, but it hasn't been definitively proven until now, with this study," says Haven physician Dr. Michelle Boatwright. "Hospice patients sometimes do get better," she added, "and occasionally they recover and go home."

Because patients do better in hospice care, it's not unusual to hear families say, "We wish we had used hospice services earlier."

- Hospice care serves any patient with a prognosis of six months or less. Patients come to hospice with cancer, emphysema, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, muscular dystrophy and many other life-limiting illnesses.

Anyone can refer someone for hospice care, and at not-for-profit hospices, care is provided to all regardless of their ability to pay and whether or not someone has insurance. The hospice Medicare benefit covers the cost of all medications, medical equipment, oxygen and supplies relevant to the diagnosis. In addition, hospice patients are not required to have a living will or a "do-not-resuscitate" order to be admitted for care.

"Hospice is about life," says Dr. McCollough, "and our goal is helping patients achieve the best quality of life in the time they have left. It's a very good feeling to know we've helped someone and their family."

#### **About Haven Hospice**

Haven Hospice is North Florida's expert in end-of-life and palliative care and is one of three 2008 Circle of Life Award<sup>®</sup> winners nationwide to be recognized as leaders in improving the care of patients near the end of life or with life-threatening conditions. Haven Hospice has also been recognized as a Florida Pacesetter for its leadership in promoting living wills. Haven Hospice has served nearly 50,000 patients and families since 1979 and has been licensed in Florida as a not-for-profit hospice since 1980. For more information, visit [www.havenhospice.org](http://www.havenhospice.org) or call 800-727-1889.

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