

# Hospice: right care, at right time, in right place

This year, Iowa City Hospice is celebrating its 30th anniversary. It remains a mission-driven organization that provides compassionate care for those individuals living with a life-limiting illness and their families through quality medical, emotional, spiritual and social support.

Our commitment is first and foremost to the patients and families we serve.

But our constituencies extend even further, including the community, our own staff and even the payors who make Iowa City Hospice financially feasible. Being accountable to payors, including private insurance companies, Medicaid and Medicare, means we must also be committed to efficiency and providing a high value service.

For years, the hospice and palliative care community has made the case that hospice enrollment creates cost savings for Medicare. A new report published in the March issue of Health Affairs indicates this is the case — that hospice patients have lower Medicare costs, reduced use of hospital services and that hospice care improves overall care quality.

The study was conducted by the Brookdale Department of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine at the Icahn School of Medicine at Mount Sinai. Researchers looked at the most common hospice enrollment periods and found that hospice patients had significantly lower rates of hospital and intensive care use, hospital re-admissions and in-hospital death when compared to the matched non-hospice patients. Moreover, these savings appear to grow as the period of hospice enrollment lengthens.

It is important to emphasize that saving money is not the goal of Iowa City Hospice. The goal of everyone in health care is to provide the right care, at the right time and in the right place. Many people in Iowa and across the nation are learning that there is a time when aggressive treatment, intensive care and long hospital stays are no longer worth the toll they can take on quality of life. When that time comes, hospice often is the right care because it allows patients and their families the comfort and control we all want at the end of life.

Dollar savings is simply an offshoot of the public's greater understanding of end of life and the role of hospice. But it also is a sign of a cultural shift in the medical world, moving toward patient-centered care and in support of quality of life, moving away from doing everything we can and moving toward doing everything we should — with patients firmly in control.

Iowa City Hospice continues to look to our community to provide critical support that enables us to serve those without any ability to pay. Last year we provided 1,822 days of charity care.

Our Walk for Dignity is our primary fundraiser and serves as a celebration of life and the philosophy of hospice care. Please join us at the Walk for Dignity on April 21 in Willow Creek Park. Festivities begin at noon with our volunteers, the 2013 Honorary Walk Family, leading the way at 1 p.m.

More information, including ways to use the walk to raise funds for Iowa City Hospice can be found on our website, <http://iowacityhospice.org>.