



Common Diagnosis in Hospice

The first hospice in the United States, Connecticut Hospice was started in 1974 by the Dean of Yale School of Nursing, two pediatricians and a chaplain in Branford, Connecticut. During the early days of hospice in the United States cancer was the primary reason patients received hospice care. So today a lot of people still believe that hospice is only for cancer patients.

Currently, patients with cancer make up less than half of those patients admitted to hospice. In fact according to NHPCO only 36.6% of patients have cancer as a primary diagnosis and 63.3% have non-cancer diagnosis.

Hospice is available for any patient coping with the end-stage of any chronic disease, which includes many diagnoses and virtually any life-limiting condition. The top four non-cancer diagnosis patients were admitted to hospice for in 2014 according to NHPCO were: Dementia- 14.8%; Heart disease-14.7%; Lung disease-9.3% and Stroke or Coma-6.4%.

Hospice is based on the terminal prognosis of six months or less to live, rather than a specific diagnosis.

What you will learn:

- Common diagnosis seen in hospice.
- Suggestions when caring for patients with the diagnosis
- Statistics related to disease



“Dementia is our most feared illness, more than heart disease or cancer.”

- David Perlmutter



The Tribute is a monthly newsletter published for member agencies in honor of our Hospice volunteers!

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The Top Four Non-Cancer Diagnosis

#1 Dementia

Today there are an estimated 35.6 million people worldwide with dementia. This number is expected to double by 2030. The most common cause of dementia is Alzheimer’s disease although there are other types such as Vascular, Lewy body, Huntington’s and others. This is one of the most dreadful conditions that patients and families have to endure. Patients may live for many years with dementia.

Manifestations of dementia are memory loss, unable to make decisions/choices, disoriented, loss of coordination, inability to do the tasks they once were able to perform, paranoia. (This list is not all inclusive.)

It is important to remember that dementia patients don’t lose their emotional memory-they are sensitive to who likes them and who doesn’t like them. Being genuine is very important when working with these patients, because they will be able to determine if you like them or not. Patients with dementia are very sensitive to one’s tone of voice.

If you have difficulty dealing with the dementia patient, please let your Volunteer Manager know, so the assignment can be changed.

Some suggestions that may help when volunteering with a patient who has dementia/Alzheimer’s are:

- Learn what they liked before their sickness
- Approach them slowly
- Be sure the patient can see you before talking to them
- Allow them more time to respond
- Ask simple questions and only one question at the time
- Touch can be important, but must know how the patient responds to touch
- Provide emotional support for patient and caregiver

There have been changes in the diagnosis patterns among Medicare hospice enrollees. There have been notable increases between 2002 and 2015 in neurologically-based diagnoses, including various dementia and Alzheimer's diagnoses.

--Fed. Register



The Top Four Non-Cancer Diagnosis

#2 Heart Disease

Heart disease is the leading cause of death for men and women in the United States. The most common type of heart disease is coronary artery disease (CAD), which may lead to heart attack. Every year about 1 in every 4 deaths in America is from heart disease.

Another condition we see in hospice is end stage Heart failure. This may be called Congestive Heart Failure or CHF. This condition happens when the heart can no longer pump enough blood and oxygen to support the other organs in your body. Estimates are that 5.7 million people in the United States have heart failure.

Manifestations may include: Swelling (Edema) in extremities or other parts of the body, shortness of breath- unable to speak in complete sentences, inability to lie flat in the bed, dizziness, fatigue & weakness.

Measures to promote comfort are:

- Report observations of new symptoms or complaints to Volunteer Manager
- Offer emotional support for patient/family
- Be an active listener

The Top Four Non-Cancer Diagnosis

#3 Lung Disease

Lung disease is any problem in the lungs that prevents the lungs from working properly. There are three main types of lung disease:

* Airway diseases -- These diseases affect the tubes (airways) that carry oxygen and other gases into and out of the lungs. They usually cause a narrowing or blockage of the airways. Examples are asthma & COPD.

* Lung tissue diseases -- These diseases affect the structure of the lung tissue. The lungs lose their elasticity because of scarring or inflammation of the tissue and can't expand (restrictive lung disease). Examples are pulmonary fibrosis & sarcoidosis.

* Lung circulation diseases -- These diseases affect the blood vessels in the lungs and may be caused by clotting, scarring, or inflammation of the blood vessels. Pulmonary hypertension is a circulation disease.

Manifestations of lung disease are: chronic cough sometimes called "smoker's cough", chronic phlegm production, shortness of breath, inability to take a deep breath, wheezing, anxiety associated with "air hunger."

Comfort measures include: Emotional support, Presence-sometimes the patient is unable to carry on conversation, calm environment, and a non-judgmental attitude.



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#4: Stroke or Coma

Stroke is the fifth leading cause of death in the United States. It is sometimes referred to as a CVA or brain attack. The stroke occurs when a clot blocks the blood supply to the brain or when a blood vessel in the brain bursts. The hospice patients we care for may have had a stroke in the past and left with deficits or they may have had a massive stroke which results in the patient being in a coma.

When volunteering with a patient in a coma remember to always talk to the patient as if they can hear you. Do not talk over them as if they aren't there or they can't hear.

Credits: <https://www.abramsoncenter.org/research/resources/hospice-myths-misconceptions/> ; <https://medlineplus.gov/ency/article/000066.htm>; https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fs_heart_disease.htm ; https://www.nhpco.org/sites/default/files/public/Statistics_Research/2015_Facts_Figures.pdf https://www.cdc.gov/dhdsp/data_statistics/fact_sheets/fs_stroke.htm ; Federal Register, April, 2016