

South Carolina Citizens for Life is your first source of hospice information. Contact us and we will send you a list of hospices serving your county that are licensed by the S.C. Department of Health and Environmental Control.

Once you have this information from South Carolina Citizens for Life, it is time to contact the various hospices and ask the hard questions. The following are suggested questions to help make an informed and pro-life decision about hospice.

How long has the hospice been serving this community?

A hospice needs time in a community to develop good local resources, and to find trained volunteers to assist the patient. The longer the hospice has been established, the better.

Where is the hospice located?

There are many huge hospices in South Carolina. It is important to know if the hospice staff must travel from several counties away to give care. If the hospice is more than two counties away from the patient, it will take longer to provide emergency services. The huge hospices may be the best choice only if they have local sub-offices to serve the patient.

What services are provided by the hospice?

At a minimum, the services of a registered nurse (RN), social worker, home health aide, and chaplain should be available. Each of these services may not be needed immediately, but can be added to the care regime as the disease progresses. Some hospices have only volunteers and may lack many needed services.

Are all of the nurses RNs or will a licensed practical nurse (LPN) be the primary nurse?

It may be best to choose a hospice that uses more highly trained staff RNs exclusively.

Does the staff have specialized hospice training?

Hospice is a very different type of care from other medical care. Specialized skills are needed to be proficient in hospice care.

Who develops the patient's plan of care?

A good hospice will include input from the patient, family members and caregivers, the personal physician, nurse, social worker, pastor or chaplain, and the care

aide. It is important that each of these different people be involved. By working together, a plan goes from being a puzzle of needs to a coordinated picture of individualized care. The plan of care must reflect patient desires.

Will the patient usually have the same caregivers and how often will they visit?

Close relationships develop between the patient and primary care givers. It can be disruptive or uncomfortable if the care team's personnel do not remain stable. It is important to know beforehand how often hospice staff members will visit the patient.

Are compounded medications and other alternate methods of symptom control used?

Most medications can be compounded into creams or liquids that are easier to administer.

Will the patient be consulted before changes are made to the plan of care?

The patient and loved ones have the right to veto or modify the plan of care including requesting a different staff person without fear of reprisal.

What are the emergency procedures, and what is the average response time by phone and in person?

A well run hospice will have a back-up plan if the person on call is attending another emergency. The patient should not have to wait to be seen and evaluated.

How are problems, or patient and family complaints handled?

It is important that the patient and family understand and are comfortable with the steps of filing a complaint.

How are purchasing decisions for equipment and medications made?

The patient and family should be consulted before the hospice orders equipment or medications that hospice benefits do not cover.

Is this hospice owned by or affiliated with any physician or hospital?

If the hospice is owned by the patient's physician or hospital, the patient and family may be told they cannot choose the hospice they prefer. Remember, the

patient always has the right to choose the hospice agency.

Are patients required to have a Do Not Resuscitate order (DNR)?

A DNR requirement may limit the amount of care provided, especially near the end of life when it is most needed. If the hospice requires a DNR, consider another hospice.

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HOW TO CHOOSE A PRO-LIFE HOSPICE

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When a terminal illness strikes, and you or your loved ones are referred for hospice care, the decisions you face may seem overwhelming. How do you find the right hospice? What questions should you ask?