KEY MESSAGES ABOUT HOSPICE CARE

What is Hospice Care?
- Hospice is not a place but a concept of care that is recognized as the model of quality, compassionate health care delivery for people facing life-limiting illness.
- There are 3,300 hospice providers in the United States that provided care to more than 885,000 terminally ill Americans in 2002.
- Hospice care utilizes an interdisciplinary team of health care professionals and trained volunteers that address symptom control, pain management, and emotional and spiritual support expressly tailored to the patient’s needs and wishes.
- Support, caregiver training, and grief counseling are available for family and loved ones. Bereavement services are available for a year following the death of the patient.
- While most hospice services are provided in the home, care is also available in most skilled nursing facilities, residential care settings, and inpatient hospices.
- Hospice allows the illness to follow its natural course. The focus is on caring, not curing.
- Hospice provides care regardless of diagnosis.
- At the center of hospice is the belief that each of us should be able to die pain-free with dignity, and that our families receive the necessary support to allow us to do so.

Hospice Care is Not Limited to Six-months of Service:
- While many insurance companies, as well as the Medicare Hospice Benefit, require that a terminally ill patient have a prognosis of six months or less, there is not a six-month limit to hospice care services.
- Hospice eligibility requirements should not be confused with length of service.
- A patient in the final phase of life may receive hospice care for as long as necessary when a physician certifies that he or she continues to meet eligibility requirements.
- Under the Medicare Hospice Benefit, two 90-day periods of care (a total of six months) are followed by an unlimited number of 60-day periods.
- Nearly 10% of hospice patients receive hospice care for six months or longer.
- Hospice services are covered under Medicare, Medicaid, most private insurance plans, HMOs, and other managed care organizations.
Americans are Aging:
- Today, there are more than 40 million Americans over the age of 65; in the next thirty years that number is expected to double.
- People over the age of 85 are the fastest growing segment of our population.
- It is estimated that there are more than 72,000 people who have reached 100 years of age. In the next fifty years that number is expected to reach 834,000.
- It is estimated that fewer than 25% of all Americans have completed advance directives that tell their family and physician what their wishes would be should they face a life-limiting illness.

Increasing Awareness is Vital:
- While the number of Americans receiving hospice and palliative care grows each year, NHPCO estimates that for every patient who receives hospice, two more patients could benefit from the comprehensive services hospice provides but do not receive this special care.
- In 2001, NHPCO statistics reveal that 34% of hospice patients died within seven days or less, often an inadequate time for the patient and family to take advantage of the range of available services.
- Many people are unaware that hospice care is available for nursing facility residents.
- Lack of awareness of hospice means that too many Americans still die alone or in pain. Too many patients are being referred to hospice care too late, or not at all. And too many families are left without bereavement support.
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services has indicated that expanding the reach of hospice care holds enormous potential benefits for those nearing the end of life, whether they are in nursing homes, their own homes, or in hospitals.

Hospice is the Care Americans Want:
- Research by the National Hospice Foundation identifies the top four concerns Americans have surrounding end-of-life care:
  o Someone to be sure that the patient’s wishes are enforced;
  o Choice among the types of services the patient can receive;
  o Pain control tailored to the patient’s wishes; and
  o Emotional support for the patient and family.
- Research has consistently shown that almost 80% of Americans would prefer to die in their homes, free of pain, surrounded by family and loved ones. Hospice makes this happen. However, of the 2.4 million people who die in this country each year, only 25% actually die at home.
- Research has also found that people are willing to have an outside organization come into their homes and assist with care for a family
member in the last stage of life. Sixty-six percent would welcome help from an outside organization, like hospice, while 24% would prefer to take care of the family member by themselves, with the help of family and friends.

- NHPCO reports that only 10% of all patients who died under hospice care in 2001 died in a hospital.
- Hospice and palliative care addresses the major concerns of most Americans.

- For more information, visit www.caringinfo.org or call 800/658-8898, 877/658-8896 for Spanish language.