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*Hospice
of Cincinnati*

Rebecca Bechhold, M.D.,
Medical Director

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Compassion and Comfort
for Patients and Families*

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Compassion and Comfort for Patients and Families

By Carol Lloyd

Vicki Wilkens wishes she had been referred to Hospice of Cincinnati earlier in her husband Ernie's fight with a rare form of lymphoma. As it was, she treasured many aspects of the 27 days he spent in the Blue Ash facility before his death last October.

"The surroundings at Hospice are

so much better than at the hospital," says Vicki. "The Hospice was pretty, it was comfortable and attractive. The setting alone made you feel a little better."

She remembers that his second day at Hospice, "Ernie was like a whole new person. The pain was much better controlled. He had been

in horrendous pain before that." For a short time at Hospice "he was like the old Ernie—he had a sense of humor, he was funny with our friends and family. Those days were a real gift."

Almost as important as pain management to Vicki was getting information about his imminent death. She was desperate to understand what was happening and was relieved to learn the practical information the Hospice staff gave her.

"The nurses especially were wonderful," she says.

Lack of information given to terminally ill patients and their families is particularly frustrating to

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—Vicki Wilkens, spouse of hospice patient



Surrounded by scenic landscape, Hospice of Cincinnati in Blue Ash offers a comfortable choice to patients who can no longer remain at home. The first of its kind in the Greater Cincinnati area, the facility offers wonderful services, professional staff and beautiful outdoor gardens. Photo by Malcolm J. Wilson, Norton Photography 2.

Rebecca Bechhold, M.D., medical director of Hospice of Cincinnati. She insists that medicine must treat death as another stage of caring for the whole person.

"We need to approach these patients as people who have moved into a different phase, the same way

"Many of the families who use our services state that they wished they had been referred sooner." Late referrals mean that patients don't get the full benefit of hospice care, she says.

**—Leigh Gerdsen, Director
Hospice of Cincinnati**

we talk about open heart surgery or organ transplants."

Not that discussing death with patients is easy, she acknowledges. "But the alternative, pretending or



Rebecca Bechhold, M.D., medical oncologist and medical director of the facility visits with a patient in one of the many tranquil courtyards at the Hospice of Cincinnati Blue Ash. Photo by Malcolm J. Wilson, Norton Photography 2.

Hospice of Cincinnati Mercy Hospital Hamilton

"The Hospice of Cincinnati unit at Mercy Hospital Hamilton provides much needed services to residents of the greater Hamilton area," says David Ferrell, FACHE, president Mercy Hospital Hamilton/Fairfield, and trustee, Hospice of Cincinnati.

Serving the Butler County community, this unit features:

- Ten private rooms, each with its own bathroom, phone and cable TV
- A family lounge
- Twenty-four hour visiting for family, friends of all ages, and pets
- Specially trained hospice staff

"Terminally ill patients deserve the personalized care that hospice provides," says William Krall, M.D., associate medical director of Hospice of Cincinnati.

just not dealing with the eventuality, is really shortchanging the patient and the family. We can't ignore this aspect of life."

Some physicians, she notes, say they're reluctant to discuss the hospice option because they feel it takes away people's hope.

"However, this concern can be dealt with by explaining that hospice means a good quality of life, it means being surrounded by your loved ones, it means you won't suffer. That's part of hope, too. I want physicians to understand that they can be hopeful and still be realistic."

Late Referral Deprives Patients and Families of Benefits

Unfortunately, too many physicians delay referring patients to hospice. They're not aware of the broad scope of services hospice offers.

"Many of the families who use our services state that they wished they had been referred sooner," says Leigh Gerdsen, director, Hospice of Cincinnati. Gerdsen notes that the national average length of stay for hospice services is 46 days, while the average length of stay in the Cincinnati area is 28 days. Late re-

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referrals mean that patients don't get the full benefit of hospice care, she says.

For hospice patients, those benefits run the gamut from matters of physical comfort—massages and whirlpool baths—to emotional comfort—making a scrapbook or tape for their loved ones to treasure as a keepsake.

Late referrals also put an undue strain on already anguished families, says Bechhold. "Maybe the person is in pain and the caregivers are exhausted. Many families reach a breaking point and then there's a crisis. Hospice can prevent that crisis by offering a support system early on—before a crisis erupts."

Hospice services for the terminally ill patient and family:

- An RN case manager who visits the patient at home and maintains contact with the patient's physician

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—Vicki Wilkens

- Expert pain and symptom management with comfort as the goal
- An RN on call 24 hours every day to triage after-hour concerns and make home visits as needed
- Personal instruction to caregivers about how best to care for the patient
- Home health aides to help with the patient's personal care and relieve the family
- Volunteers
- Medications, equipment, oxygen and supplies, as appropriate, at no cost, and delivered to the home
- Emotional support and counseling for patient and caregivers by so-

- cial workers and chaplains
- Bereavement support (individual counseling or support groups) for family and friends for 12 months following the patient's death
- "Expressions" program for children experiencing the loss of a significant adult in their lives
- Opportunities for children to attend Camp WeBelong, a summer camp, and teens to attend a fall weekend retreat to help them cope with the death of loved ones. These programs are offered in partnership with Fernside: A Center for Grieving Children
- Respite care in one of the Hospice

Michelle Angel, RN, CRNH on left and William R. Krall, M.D., far right, visit with a patient and spouse in the family lounge at the Hospice of Cincinnati Mercy Hamilton Inpatient Unit. Photo by Malcolm J. Wilson, Norton Photography 2.





The great room/library at Hospice of Cincinnati Blue Ash offers a homelike setting where patients and family can gather. Photo by Malcolm J. Wilson, Norton Photography 2.

of Cincinnati facilities and residential care for those needing extended stays

- Inpatient acute care at one of the Hospice of Cincinnati units or within many of the area hospitals
- Coordinated care for residents in long-term care facilities

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Home Care Services

The Home Care program serves more than 90 percent of Hospice's patients, providing intermittent care not intended to replace the primary caregiver in the home. A 24-hour, seven-day-a-week phone service links the patient and family with

one of the Home Care nurses should problems and/or questions arise. Each patient has a primary nurse who coordinates his or her medically directed care. Services are available in the Hamilton, Clermont, Butler and Warren counties.

Through the home care program hospice also serves terminally ill patients in long-term care facilities. With over 50 contracts, Hospice provides additional services and support at no added cost to the Hospice patient or facility.

Inpatient Services

Hospice of Cincinnati offers care at inpatient facilities in Blue Ash

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and Mercy Hospital Hamilton. The inpatient facilities offer private rooms for acute, residential and respite care. The Blue Ash facility, which recently celebrated its second anniversary, is a bright, airy building with numerous amenities for 40 patients and their families. Each room has large windows and views of the landscaped grounds. The motif of growth and nature is carried throughout the building in the wall-paper, upholstery, and other decorative touches. A comfortable great room and dining room allow families and friends to gather and share a meal or simply enjoy each other's company in a cozy setting. Visitors—and that includes children and pets—are welcome 24 hours a day.

A special play area off the great room includes puppets and art mate-

rials. In fact, children are the focus of special attention at Hospice of Cincinnati. In addition to camp, they can participate in individual or family counseling and support groups and they may also choose to work on a square of the Children's Memory Quilt.

The staff, services, and facilities of Hospice of Cincinnati combine to provide compassionate, personalized care to terminally ill people as well as offer comfort and support to their loved ones during the patient's illness, after the death and through bereavement. Since the beginning of this nonprofit organization 22 years ago, the Hospice of Cincinnati provides physical, emotional and spiritual care in a way that affirms life and supports choices in an environment of dignity and respect.

Who is Appropriate for Hospice of Cincinnati?

Hospice care is appropriate for any patient with a life expectancy of approximately six months. Common diagnoses include:

- Cancer
- COPD
- Congestive heart failure
- Stroke
- Dementia
- Parkinson's
- Alzheimer's

Any patient who is no longer getting therapeutic benefits from medical treatment is appropriate for referral.

"Expressions" provides a variety of supportive services to help children and families during the serious illness or after the death of a loved one. Diane Dawson, MSW, LSW, is the children's services coordinator for Hospice of Cincinnati. She is encouraging these children to keep the memories of loved ones alive through drawing a picture of a favorite activity fulfilled with the hospice patient. Photo by Malcolm J. Wilson, Weston Photography, LLC.

