

3 SIGNS IT MIGHT BE TIME FOR HOSPICE

It is amazing how we can watch a movie, enjoy a great story, and for the entire story ignore all the elements that are unrealistic. This is called, *Suspension of Disbelief*. Without suspension of disbelief we would spend our movie watching fixated on every time a car defies the laws of physics, every hero who dodges thousands of bullets, and every time the bomb set to blow in 1 minute actually takes 5 minutes to detonate. We put aside reality so we can enjoy the story, but we don't take Hollywood's depiction of life and apply it to our daily life. Except in one area of life – death. We watch characters on the screen go from healthy and functioning one minute and within 5 minutes they say their last profound words and die. We take this picture of dying and let it shape what we expect in our real lives.

The problem is that there are many people who are missing out on wonderful care in their last months of life simply because people don't recognize that their loved one is actually dying. I believe it is good for us to recognize that dying is a process that can take months and that these people deserve great care during the entire dying process. Therefore, I want to give you Three Signs it Might be Time for Hospice.

#1 SIGN: Decline in Health:

The dying process is actually a long health decline that can take months. It is marked by good days and bad days, but overtime the good days are not as good as the last ones and the bad are worse than before. Here are some common signs of a decline in health:

- You start seeing multiple specialists
- You have monthly doctor appointments
- You are on 10 or more meds
- Nothing is getting better and there are not clear answers of why
- More short of breath, more pain, more tired and weak even though symptoms are treated
- More Emergency Room visits and hospital visits
- Frequent infections
- Consistent loss of weight

2 SIGN: Professionals are saying...

There is a common characteristic that most doctors, nurses, and medical professionals share – they are problem solvers. They have applied this amazing ability to solve problems within the human body. I am glad there are many over the years who have dedicated so much energy and care to solve our health problems. Because they have this built into who they are it is difficult for them to admit that the problem cannot be solved. Most doctors have not received training in how to tell someone that the problem is that they are beginning the dying process. Do not forget that your doctor is human and it is difficult for many to deal

with the emotions that are involved in saying to a patient, “I don’t have a cure for you.” I am sharing all this because you need to know that your health provider might have done their best to tell you that you are not getting better and there is nothing they can do, but you might have missed it because they struggle to admit they can’t solve the problem. I want to attempt to decode what is really being said.

- “There is no further treatment that we can suggest.” Or “We have reached the limit of what medication can do”

This means your body is unable to heal itself and modern medicine cannot stop the process. They are describing a disease process that will only get worse and they will do their best to manage the symptoms. If you do not understand the progression of the illness ask, “What can I expect as I get worse?” or “Can you please describe the disease process.”

- “It might be time to consider palliative care”

Palliative care simply means that the care will not cure but will be focused on comfort and quality of life. Hospice is palliative care. It can sometimes feel your doctors are giving up on you, but I assure you they are just recognizing their limits. The introduction to hospice care is introducing you to the specialized care you need.

#3 SIGN: What you are feeling has changed

How you read this part is very different based on your perspective. The one potentially facing their end of your life has a different view than the family member who might be trying to understand what is happening to their loved one. I will attempt to address both separately.

- You: You feel tired and exhausted. You know in your heart of hearts you are not getting better. You feel you need to be honest with your family about how you are feeling but don't know how without burdening them. You feel you don't want others to do whatever it takes to keep you alive. You want peace. You are thinking about the here-and-now, not the future. You feel like you are ready.
- Family/Caregiver: You are feeling tired and exhausted. You feel you are watching your loved one just slowly getting weaker. You are unsure of what to do for your loved one. You are afraid of making a mistake that will hurt them. You don't feel like you can make plans in the future. You do not feel ready.

Conclusion

Most natural deaths are a process that involve slow declines over months. They definitely do not get wrapped up in five minutes after a deep meaningful speech. Everyone feels some level of uncertainty and fear when they are told they have a limited time to live. The Hospice of the Pines Team provides expert care and guidance so you can have peace, comfort, and quality of life. If the 3 Signs listed sounds like some of what you are experiencing, it is time to call us to arrange an evaluation. It is our honor to share the hospice heart with you.