



What the Media Said about End-of-Life Care This Week November 16, 2020 A Service of Your State Association

NHPCO ANNOUNCES POLICY AGENDA

NHPCO, working with stakeholders, says that the organization will work on a number of policy priorities for the remainder of 2020 and 2021. The priorities focus on leading “person- and family-centered care.” “Throughout 2020,” says Edo Banach, NHPCO President, “NHPCO has strongly encouraged Congress and the Administration to promote the following policies that improve access to high quality hospice and palliative care while mitigating the risk of further spreading COVID-19, enabling providers to focus their resources on ensuring access to quality care for all Americans facing serious illness.”

The priorities, as announced by NHPCO, include, first of all, working to “protect care for patients and families during” the pandemic. This includes such efforts as insuring adequate PPE and testing (and vaccines once they are available) to protect hospice workers, patients and caregivers. NHPCO will work to expand both respite care and bereavement services for COVID survivors and families. NHPCO will serve as advocates for providers so that they are not penalized if they sought financial support via the CARES Act Provider Relief fund. NHPCO is also working to delay the Value Based Demonstration Model, which is now set to launch in January 2021. And the organization will encourage the suspension of widespread audits while we are living in a public health emergency.

Another policy priority is ensuing program integrity. This means working toward programs and structures “to improve accountability with appropriate oversight.” This policy includes training surveyors, and providing “competencies for oversight and review of hospice clinical care and operations.”

Another priority for NHPCO is making “meaningful reforms to improve access, health equity, and inclusivity.” In this effort, NHPCO works to allow patients to have concurrent, curative, and other care. Moving community-based palliative care upstream before hospice care is also noted. Additionally, there is a plan to address eligibility for hospice, tying election of hospice care to need rather than timing of prognosis. Rural and underserved communities will be supported in removing the barriers to hospice and palliative care. Education for providers and disparities in care will be addressed by “educating providers and offering culturally-appropriate resources.” The workforce can expect increases in training that help to address the shortages among hospice and palliative care professionals. (NHPCO, 11/13) [Read more...](#)

ARTICLE EXPLORES THE IMPORTANCE OF “WEBSITE MANNER” WHEN DISCUSSING SERIOUS ILLNESS WITH PATIENTS

Along with COVID-19 has come the rise of both serious illness conversations and phone or videoconferencing between healthcare providers and these patients. The use of these virtual visits has sky-rocketed during this time. With the ability of patients and caregivers to see one another via video-conferencing, easing of HIPAA regulations to allow such to happen, and the growth in reimbursement policies, this mushrooming practice has grown substantially. But, say authors of “Webside Manner during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Maintaining Human Connection during Virtual Visits,” “many physicians have not received training in delivering optimal care through a video medium.” This is especially important when the patient is seriously ill.

Just as bedside manner relies on clinician’s skill to develop trust and build relationships, this webside manner is important in the caregiving relationship. And, say the authors, it begins with the first visit. The article provides specific suggestions for caregivers to support the building of these relationships with seriously ill patients. Noting the importance of eye contact, for example, the authors suggest that the clinician’s head and upper third of torso be visible to the patient. Bring the patient’s “image as close as possible to the camera” to enhance the feeling that the clinician is looking directly at the patient.

The article provides a list of key elements of the virtual visit. Specific tips are provided for each of these key elements. These tips include areas such as assuring proper setup, beginning the visit, maintaining interactive conversation, responding to emotions, and closing the visit. Of particular importance, say the authors, is using verbal responses to emotions. Be sure patients understand that you are hearing their concerns and offering an understanding of this to them.

Use comments, say the authors, to help address the emotions of patients during the visit. “I wish I could be there to comfort you.” Or, “Take your time. I am here,” are offered as supportive statements. As the visit nears the end, summarize the discussion, assure the participant/s understands what has been discussed, invite questions, and outline what will happen next.

After addressing these tips and ideas to providing a good telehealth visits, the authors also note some of the barriers. Some patients lack equipment and technical skills to engage in these visits. COVID-19 has shown the value and need for these interactions and the health care system needs to address the challenges of being sure all patients can access these visits. “Effective webside manner skills are essential to help clinicians maintain their empathic connections as they virtually guide patients and families through these unprecedented times,” say the authors. (*Journal of Palliative Medicine*,10/14)

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HOSPICE NOTES

* AccentCare, based in Dallas, Rosemont, and Illinois's Seasons Hospice and Palliative Care (Seasons), along with Advent International, "global private equity investors and owner of AccentCare," shared the news that they have "signed a definitive agreement to combine their two robust organizations." The combined new organization will have over 225 sites in 26 states. The organization will have almost 30,000 professionals, and offer care to over 175,000 patients and families per year. There are also plans for expansion. "The agreement covers Seasons, Health Resource Solutions (HRS) a 2,500 census home health provider in Illinois, Nebraska and Indiana, and Gareda, a personal care business in Illinois, serving over 4,500 clients annually." More details about the plan are online at the link below. (*maryvilleforum.com*, (Maryville, MO) 11/16) [Read more...](#)

* CMS's [Change Request 12015](#), dated 11/6, addresses "Manual Updates Related to the Hospice Election Statement and the Implementation of the Election Statement Addendum." The Change Request is now online at the link below, and went into effect on October 1. (CMS, 11/6)

* Hosparus Health announced a five-year funding campaign. With a \$24 million goal, Hosparus's "The People of Compassion Campaign is focused on enhancing services, supporting operational needs, expansion in Louisville and the region, developing endowments and business development, and funding deferred gifts for long-term sustainability." Hosparus, a not-for-profit organization, has operated since 1978, and services 41 Kentucky and Indiana counties. The article at the link below gives details on the campaign. (*News and Tribune*, Jeffersonville, Indiana, 11/6) [Learn more...](#)

* A \$1 million donation to Hospice of Michigan and Arbor Hospice supports the "Van Allsburg Pediatric Hospice Art Program." The program, named to honor the donors, Lisa and Chris Van Allsburg, provides sets of art supplies to young hospice patients and an art program for the children to attend. (*9&10 News*, Cadillac, MI, 11/13) [Read more...](#)

* An article in *Religious News Service* examines the growth of Buddhist-oriented hospices. These hospices in the US and other countries continue to emerge. The article explores the concepts and practices of such hospices and the experiences they seek for patients. (*Religious News Service*, 11/12) [Read more...](#)

* An article in *The San Diego Union Tribune* examines concerns related to the compensation of the Scripps CEO, and includes reference to use of hospice donations. In "Scripps Health executive compensation, use of hospice donations called into question," is a brief description of concerns over hospice donations. Scripps took over the San Diego Hospice after its 2013 bankruptcy, and later sold the property for a profit. There are questions about donations that were received for the hospice three years after Scripps was no longer in the "hospice care business." But one donor, "the Geisel Trust of Dr. Seuss fame," is seeking judicial clarification on how the money may be used. Details are available online at the link below. (*San Diego Tribune*, 11/14) [Learn more...](#)

END OF LIFE

* A recent article, published in the *Journal of Palliative Medicine*, reports on a literature review that was focused on the expectations, preference, and needs for palliative and EOL care of LGBTQ older women. Researchers examined 16 articles published between 1996 and 2019. Several concerns specific to LGBTQ women were found. These concerns include “vulnerability associated with isolation and poverty, women’s social needs and support networks, and preferences for complementary care.” Researchers conclude that more research is needed. Areas for this continuing research include examination of older LGBTQ women’s preparation for life’s end and preferences for support. (*Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 10/14) [Learn more...](#)

* An article in the *Journal of Palliative Medicine* explores the “End-of-Life Dreams and Visions in Pediatric Patients.” The case study of a terminally ill 15-year old girl tells of her dreams and notes that many dreams of terminally ill patients have similar themes. These end-of-life dreams and visions (ELDV) offer comfort to patients and families alike. The experiences leave feelings of being with loved ones who have already died, and experiences of joy, comfort, love and peace. The article encourages clinicians to “recognize their potential impact on terminally ill children, adolescents, and their families.” (*Journal of Palliative Medicine*, 10/14) [Read more...](#)

* An article in *McKnight’s* explores the real benefits of virtual care near the end of life, focusing on its use with residents who are dying in skilled nursing and assisted living facilities. The author of the article, who is VITAS’s chief medical officer, calls for the establishment of telehealth as a permanent option, saying the practice promotes quality of life and patient and family satisfaction. Many of these patients are separated from their families due to COVID. VITAS healthcare, says the article, has found “clinical success and improved family satisfaction in these patients’ care by using telehealth for a variety of purposes.” These purposes include “head-to-toe” physical exams; virtual exploration of the patient’s living areas, which helps nurses determine what DME might be needed; talking about goals of care and advance care planning; and creation of virtual support groups for bereavement. Telehealth also helps families stay engaged and updated. (*McKnight’s*, 11/12) [Read more...](#)

* A podcast on *KevinMD* features Roger Klinger talking with physician Kevin Pho about medical aid in dying, which Klinger says is not assisted suicide. Klinger shares about his work with patients nearing the end of life, as well as his own terminal cancer. Klinger is working in Massachusetts on legal action to assure that medical aid in dying is available. The podcast is available online at the link below. (*KevinMD*, 11/8) [Access the podcast here.](#)

PALLIATIVE CARE NOTES

* “Palliative care and the importance of holding space” is a podcast on *KevinMD*. “Holding space means being physically, mentality, and emotionally present for someone.” The presence is offered without judgement and open to all feelings someone may share. Simply put, you listen. You “hold space.” The podcast, with palliative care physician Faryal Michaud, is online at the link below. (*KevinMD*)

[Access the podcast here.](#)

* An article in *Jewish Exponent* features palliative care physician Mari Siegel. Siegel compares her work during COVID to that of being a rabbi. She becomes a patient advocate, working to address needs of both patients and families. The training of a palliative care physician offers expertise in communication, she says. (*Jewish Exponent*, Philadelphia, 11/11) [Read more...](#)

* “All hospitals should offer counseling for parents of seriously ill infants” is an opinion article on *The Tennessean*. “The importance of end-of-life and palliative care counseling for parents with children in neonatal and pediatric ICUs is of undeniable importance,” says the article. Parents deserve education and counseling as they face these devastating emotional situations and make decisions for the infant’s care. Unfortunately not all hospitals provide these services. (*Tennessean*, 11/13) [Read more...](#)

OTHER NOTES

* *The Center to Transform Advance Care (C-TAC)* says it looks forward to working with the Biden administration and Congress “to improve the quality of life for people with serious illness and their families, especially those from marginalized communities that have been historically underserved and overlooked.” The *C-TAC* statement on the results of the election identifies a number of concerns that must be addressed, and expresses hope for the continued work to address these issues and needs. (*C-TAC*, November 2020) [Read more...](#)

* *C-TAC’s Weekly Alert* offers an article on the “health-focused transition plans” of the Biden administration and provides an overview of these plans. (*C-TAC*, 11/11) [Read more...](#); (*C-TAC*, 11/10) [Read more...](#)

* *The Hastings Center* is sponsoring a conversation with Dr. Anthony Fauci on “the ethical issues raised by the erosion of trust in science.” The no-cost event does require registration available at the second link below. The event is on November 19 from 11-11:45 a.m. EST. (*The Hastings Center*) [Learn more about the webinar.](#) ; [Register here for the webinar.](#)

* The increase of coronavirus deaths also finds an increase in mental health needs. Mental health professionals, says a story from *4 CBS Miami*, “are bracing for a grief pandemic.” With the inability to be with dying loved ones, and the enormity of the losses, millions are grieving. (*4 CBS Miami*, 11/9) [Read more...](#)

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