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“ Hospice and Palliative Care – the Richest Benefit in Health Care”

Albion, NY: Dr. Christopher Kerr, key author of “Clinical Impact of a Home-Based Palliative Care Program: A Hospice – Private Payer Partnership”¹, published this year in the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* addressed a large group of community members gathered at the Hoag library Saturday afternoon to celebrate National Hospice Month.

Dr. Kerr, Chief Medical Officer for The Center for Hospice and Palliative Care in Buffalo, challenged his audience with these words: “We live in a death defying culture! We spend per capita more than any other country in the world yet people are not getting better service and die in hospitals when they’d rather be at home with their families!” He then made a strong case for hospice and palliative care as a way to ensure better services and reduce hospitalization. Palliative care, he explained, focuses on relieving symptoms but not curing the disease. Palliative care focuses on improving comfort and quality of life while a person is seeking treatment for their advanced illness. Research shows that “when symptoms are treated, people live longer. In-home nursing care makes the difference. “ Palliative care is an important part of the continuum of services provided by hospice and provides higher quality of service at a lower cost than hospitalization.

He also dispelled some popular myths about hospice care:

Myth: *Hospice means the patient will soon die.*

Reality: Receiving hospice care does not mean giving up hope or that death is imminent. The earlier an individual receives hospice care, the more opportunity there is to stabilize a patient’s medical condition and address other needs.

Myth: *Once a patient elects hospice, they can no longer receive care from the primary care physician.*

Reality: Most people don’t know that Hospice is an *entitlement* and an *additive* service to other regimes of care. Hospice reinforces the patient-primary physician relationship by advocating either office or home visits and considers the continuation of the patient-physician relationship to be of the highest priority.

Myth: *Hospice means giving up hope.*

Reality: When faced with a terminal illness, many patients and family members tend to dwell on the imminent loss of life rather than making the most of the life that remains. Hospice helps patients reclaim the spirit of life. Hospice focuses on pain management and symptom relief to ensure that a patient's remaining days will be peaceful, free of pain and discomfort.

"Hospice is the *richest* benefit in health care!" He stated. "People get palliative care, medication and medication management, medical equipment and supplies, social work services, psychosocial and spiritual support, health education, respite, personal care by nursing staff and home health aides, 24-hour on call service and assistance with advance care planning. It is a service that helps the patient as well as the family."

Dr. Kerr shared some of his own personal experiences as a physician. He made a strong case for the benefits of hospice in reducing medical costs and noted that "Most patients tell me 'I wish I'd come to Hospice sooner.'"

The event, sponsored by Hospice of Orleans, also featured a demonstration of massage therapy by Katie Crooks and a presentation by Hospice music therapist, Brittany Dix who shared a video of one of her sessions with a patient. Staff was on hand to answer questions and make available *Light a Life* holiday ornaments that may be customized to commemorate someone special during the holiday season.

Hospice of Orleans is a not-for-profit organization serving residents of Orleans County. The organization is unique in that it offers a continuum of care options: the Hospice program, a Palliative Care program and a Transitions Program. These services are all augmented by specialized grant funded services.

According to the latest United States census, 16% of the population of Orleans County, 6,757 residents, are 65 years of age or older. Eleven percent (11%), 743, live alone. A study completed by Cornell University demonstrates that the senior population of the county is expected to rise to 18.5% of the population by the year 2020. Clearly, this will result in an increase in demand for the services provided by Hospice of Orleans. If you or someone you love would benefit from Hospice of Orleans programs, or would like more information, please call the office at 585-589-0809. ~
