

## COORDINATED CARE AND WHY HOSPICE IS ESSENTIAL TO THE FUTURE

Many in the U.S. medical system have come to expect care that is disconnected, inefficient, and adds a new layer of stress to medical issues. In this “increasingly broken and fragmented health care system, hospice care – the nation’s first coordinated care model – shows how health care should and can work at its best for patients at the end of life,” writes NHPCO president and CEO Edo Banach. His opinion piece, “Coordinated Care Is More Than a Buzzword for Hospice Providers,” appearing in the *Morning Consult*, details the long road of the hospice model that grew out of grassroots efforts to shape end-of-life care.

The hospice movement is now over 50 years in the making. It saw adaptation into Medicare in 1982 and now serves 1.7 million Americans each year, with over 80% of those patients utilizing hospice through their Medicare benefit. These services include medical care, pain management, and emotional and spiritual support that are tailored to individual wishes.

While the patient-centered care is appealing for its comfort and control, Banach argues that hospice also makes good economic sense. “This investment in care actually saves Medicare money – by one estimate, as much as \$2,300 per patient,” he writes. “Not at the expense of the patients, but rather by allowing the patients and their caregivers to guide decisions that can reduce their use of hospital-based treatments, resulting in fewer complications and side effects.”

Hospice’s use under the Medicare program has been a key element of its success, and Banach warns that “rash or untested policy shifts could lead to care delays, limitations on patients’ ability to select their preferred provider or a loss of autonomy for the hospice medical directors.” The key to reform is incremental change, he says, to ensure that adjustments do no harm, and that changes respect patient choice rather than limiting care options.

At the personal level, many families experience hospice care as a life-changing service. With a medical system that’s frustratingly fragmented, “Many are overwhelmed by the quality, compassion and personalized service that hospice care delivers.” Banach stresses that any health care reforms addressing the aging U.S. population should allow space for hospice to continue to build on this foundation of patient and family-centered care.

“Rather than just trying to make hospice more like the rest of the health care system,” Banach offers, “how about making the rest of the health care system more like the original coordinated care model?” ([Morning Consult](#))