



Hospice Care Companies and Veterans

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Hospice care is a great thing. And as hospice care has developed, it has become big business. In 2014 it was reported to be a \$17 billion industry. End-of-life care is needed, and those in the hospice care business provide a valuable service to patients and their families.

As hospice care companies developed and competition for clients grew, they realized there was a niche market – older veterans! Older veterans became easy targets as hospice companies sought business. Using good marketing techniques, professionally produced brochures, (with pictures of veterans with service caps and the U. S. Flag), the hospice companies sought to expand their business. These are “for profit” companies that specifically started targeting veterans in addition to other hospice clients.

I believe the majority of hospice companies provide a good service and are operating in good faith. While targeting and wanting to care for veterans is not necessarily a bad thing, I want you and our comrades to be informed consumers.

Representatives from two hospice companies have contacted me. They would love to have my endorsement and ultimately the VFW’s endorsement. They would love to say, as they meet with veteran families, that I support their company. VFW Chaplains and Commanders across our nation no doubt will also be contacted as hospice companies seek potential clients.

In an effort to get the word out to veterans and their families, a representative from a particular hospice company may contact VFW Commanders and Chaplains and ask to make a presentation at Department, District, and/or Post meetings, or to have literature distributed about their services to veterans. Here is an email I received:

Hello Peter,

Just wanted to touch base with you to let you know I've already met with (_____), District ___ Commander, _____ County. I spoke at their District Mtg this month briefly about _____ Hospice and Honor Flight. I'm still trying to touch base with other VFWs, and in the meantime, will be meeting with a Marine Corps League local Detachment.

I think meeting with Chaplains would be very beneficial and would like to discuss this with you. When would be a good time to call you?

Thanks so much.

(Name Removed)

Veteran Liaison

_____ Innovative Hospice Care

I have not and will not endorse any hospice company. And, I would caution you about having any hospice company make a presentation at one of your District, or Post meetings. From my research, personal conversations, and the information they provided, I have made the following observations:

- The hospice companies that are targeting veterans do not provide anything more, with regard to hospice care for veterans, than other hospice companies would do.
- The sales pitch of hospice companies targeting veterans is designed to leave the consumer with the impression that they are in business to honor and care for veterans. Remember, these are for profit companies that exist to make a profit by providing hospice care.
- I am not sure there is any significant savings to the veteran by using one of these companies. Just because they “honor veterans” doesn’t mean there is a cost benefit to the veteran.
- Providing information on VA Benefits can and should be done by one of our VFW certified Service Officers. There is no extra or added benefit by getting the information through a hospice company.

Today, when families hear that a company services and caters to veterans, they can automatically jump to the conclusion that they will be getting a discount or some special care. This may or may not be true. They should shop around and compare services and costs. Barbara Muntz, a senior advisor with Community Health Accreditation Program (CHAP), and an experienced home care and hospice nurse, wrote the following instructions to her four children about selecting hospice care for her, when the time comes. I have found this helpful in guiding families in knowing what to look for, questions to ask, and things to consider when choosing a Hospice Care Company.

1. Are you accredited by a nationally recognized accrediting organization?
 - Accreditation is not a guarantee, but hospices that seek accreditation are inspected more thoroughly, and usually more often, than those that do not.
2. How long have you maintained your accreditation?
 - Hospices that have maintained their standing through multiple cycle of accreditation show that they have sustained the kind of quality needed to provide a high level of care. Many hospices go through one accreditation survey, then do not maintain the requirements over time.
 - Look for a hospice that has been through at least two (three year) cycles of accreditation, or even better, three or more cycles.
3. What has your average daily census been for the last 12 months?
 - You would never have brain surgery at a hospital that only does five brain surgeries a year, right? Of course not – you would go to a hospital that does a ton of brain surgeries and does them well. The same principle applies to hospice. The more patients with my diagnoses that a hospice has seen in the last year, the more likely it is that the team has the expertise needed to ensure that I will get better symptom management and better care.
4. How do you manage care after hours?
 - The hospice should explain that they have a nurse on call and hospice team members can come to assist 24/7. Ask them for their after-hours call number. Then call it in the evening (Saturday nights are always good for this!) to see how long it takes to get a return call.
5. What is your model for providing continuous care?
 - Sometimes things get rough, and the patient may need round the clock care for a few days to manage symptoms or give the family a bit of a break. Every hospice must provide this care, if and when it is needed. Look for a hospice that has the staff available to do this. Ask if they have a “prn” pool or their own private duty staff to come when needed. Ask them to give you their average time to staff a continuous care case. This is a statistic that every good hospice should keep.

Hopefully, this guidance will help families in choosing hospice care. Any questions, feel free to contact me.

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