



Hospice Care Companies and Veterans

Rev. Peter R. Hook, National Chaplain

PeterHook@verizon.net

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. And it has grown every year since then. Hospice care is needed, and hospice care is a good thing. I am not against hospice care companies.

However, as hospice care companies developed and competition for clients grew, they realized there was a niche market they needed to target. That segment of society, consisting of older veterans, is an easy target as they seek to expand their business. Attached are two information sheets from companies that provide hospice care and are specifically targeting Veterans. From my research, these are for profit companies that are specifically targeting veterans in addition to other hospice clients. Take a look at the fliers and notice the picture of the veteran with a service cap on the and the flag under the title "Veteran to Veteran Hospice Volunteering" on the pieces. Both are good marketing techniques.

I believe these two companies provide a good service and are operating in good faith, but they are two of many hospice care companies that exist. 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 both 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 Rev. Peter Hook, VFW National Chaplain supports their company. VFW State, District, and Post 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 you distribute literature 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 (Name Removed), 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. Have a Happy Thanksgiving!

(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 Department, District, or Post meetings. I have met with individuals from several Hospice Companies. From my conversations and the information, they provided I have made the following observations:

- I am not sure the hospice companies that are targeting veterans provide anything more with regard to hospice care for veterans than other hospice companies would do.
- Keep in mind 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. These are for profit companies that exist to make a profit by providing hospice care.
- I am not sure there is any significant monetary 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. Also, attached is a letter from a Hospice worker on "Choosing Hospice Care When the Time Comes" that I have found helpful in guiding families in knowing what to look for when choosing a Hospice Care Company.

As VFW Chaplains we should be involved in the end-of-life care of our comrades. Whether in the hospital, a care facility, or at home, we should be there to offer supportive care to dying comrades and their families. Help them and their loved ones as they transition to glory and assure the person that he or she will not suffer or die alone. During this time of transition, as Chaplain, encourage the expression of personal feelings, anxieties, and thoughts concerning dying and the afterlife.

Letter on Choosing Hospice Care When the Time Comes

Inspired by the recent hospice articles and the latest Frontline, "Being Mortal", CHAP's Barbara Muntz decided to pen a letter to her four children about selecting her hospice care, when the time comes. She offered to share this letter in hopes of contributing to the conversation on speaking to your loved ones about hospice care.

These are the personal recommendations of Barbara Muntz and are not necessarily representative of all accredited organizations.

Dear ones,

As the time approaches for us to make choices about my healthcare, I realize that one of the decisions that you may have to face is whether or not I should be admitted to hospice care.

After working with countless anguished families through the years, I'd like to offer some guidance that might help you.

Let's get one thing clear at the outset: Choosing hospice care is not a death sentence. It is, in fact, saying "Yes" to life in every possible way. If I have a life limiting condition, like cancer or Alzheimer's or end stage heart failure, hospice can help all of us be together in the most important ways. Lots of folks I know say that hospice is a good thing, but just "not yet." If you are wondering whether or not it is time for hospice care, my darlings...it probably is.

Choosing hospice is one thing, but choosing the right hospice is another matter entirely. There are some things that I want you to consider when selecting a hospice to provide my care. Here are some questions to ask:

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.

How long have you maintained your accreditation?

- Hospices that have maintained their standing through multiple cycles 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.

What has your average daily census been for the last 12 months?

- You would never have brain surgery at a hospital that only does 5 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 in 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.

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 me 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.

What is your model for providing continuous care?

- Sometimes things get rough, and I may need round the clock care for a few days to manage symptoms or give you 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.

Life has taught me that the time to make these decisions is before we are forced to make them in haste. I never want you to have a single regret about choosing hospice care for me. Hopefully, this guidance will help.

Thank you, sweet ones, for caring for and about me. Love will sustain us, Mom

Barbara Muntz joined CHAP in early 2013. She is now in the role of Senior Advisor. She is an experienced home care and hospice nurse who previously worked at Texas Health Resources (THR), a multi-hospital healthcare delivery system. More recently, Ms. Muntz served as Chief Nursing Officer for the Visiting Nurse Association of Texas. Ms. Muntz also served on the Board of Directors for the Texas Association of Home Care and Hospice. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Nursing and a Master of Theological Studies from Brite Divinity School. Barbara has four adult children.

Any questions, feel free to contact me.

Blessings as you serve,

Rev. Peter R. Hook
National Chaplain 2024-25
Veterans of Foreign Wars
534 Parkvale Ave.
Langhorne, PA 19047
267-229-7722
Fax: 215-750-1511
PeterHook@verizon.net

