

Choosing a Hospice or Palliative Care Program:

Questions Every Family Should Ask

Care and Support

- ✓ What services are included in hospice care?
- ✓ How often will the nurse visit?
- ✓ What happens when we need more support?
- ✓ What other team members will be involved in my loved ones' care, and how often will they visit?

Symptom Management

- ✓ How do you manage pain, breathing issues, or agitation?
- ✓ How quickly can medications or equipment be delivered?
- ✓ Do you support more advanced symptom management if needed?

Communication

- ✓ How will you keep our family informed and involved?
- ✓ How do you coordinate with our physician or facility staff?

Quality and Experience

- ✓ How long have you been serving this community?
- ✓ What measures do you use to ensure quality care?

Logistics and Coverage

- ✓ What is covered by Medicare, Medicaid, or insurance?
- ✓ Are there any out-of-pocket costs we should expect?
- ✓ How do you handle medications and medical equipment?

Access and Responsiveness

- ✓ Is someone available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week?
- ✓ If we call after hours, who answers and how quickly can someone come?
- ✓ Do you send your own staff or use a call center or contractors?

Location of Care

- ✓ Where can hospice care be provided: home, facility, inpatient unit?
- ✓ If symptoms cannot be managed at home, what are the options?
- ✓ Do you have access to an inpatient hospice unit?

Support for the Family

- ✓ What support is available for caregivers?
- ✓ Do you provide education on what to expect at end of life?
- ✓ What bereavement services are offered and for how long?

Cultural and Personal Preferences

- ✓ How do you support cultural, spiritual, or personal wishes?
- ✓ Do you have experience caring for patients with conditions like dementia or cancer?
- ✓ How do you honor what matters most to the patient and family?

Choosing a Hospice or Palliative Care Program:

Questions Every Family Should Ask

Care and Support

What services are included in hospice care?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Full hospice services including nursing, social work, chaplain, bath aides, volunteers, medication management, medical equipment, and bereavement support
- ✓ **APC:** Palliative care consultations focused on symptom management, goals of care, and support while continuing curative treatment

How often will the nurse visit? What happens when we need more support?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Regular nursing visits based on need, increasing with decline or symptom burden
- ✓ **APC:** Visits based on clinic or consult schedule, not routine home hospice frequency. Typically, monthly visits with APRN but dependent on acuity; access to RN by phone in between visits.

What other team members will be involved in my loved ones' care, and how often will they visit?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Interdisciplinary team including RN, social worker, chaplain, CNA, physician oversight
- ✓ **APC:** Physician or advanced practice provider led, with support from interdisciplinary team as needed

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Access and Responsiveness

Is someone available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week if I need them?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Yes, 24/7 phone triage for urgent questions and on-call nursing, with the ability to dispatch staff
- ✓ **APC:** Staff nurse during business hours, after-hours general nursing line for urgent triage (all hours outside of normal business hours)

If we call after hours, who answers and how quickly can someone come?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Calls answered by hospice clinicians, with ability for urgent visits
- ✓ **APC:** Urgent issues are typically routed through the primary team or hospital system

Do you send your own staff or use a call center or contractors?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Calls answered by hospice clinicians and directed to Hospice Austin employees
- ✓ **APC:** Urgent issues are typically routed through the primary team or hospital system

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Symptom Management

How do you manage pain, breathing issues, or agitation?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Aggressive comfort-focused management, including medications, equipment, and escalation to inpatient care if needed
- ✓ **APC:** Symptom management alongside curative care, recommendations made with primary team

How quickly can medications or equipment be delivered?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Medications and durable medical equipment provided and delivered as part of benefit
- ✓ **APC:** Prescriptions managed through insurance and standard pharmacy channels

Do you support more advanced symptom management if needed?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** We provide advanced symptom management, including rapid medication adjustments, alternative routes like sublingual or IV, and inpatient care at Christopher House when symptoms can't be managed at home.
- ✓ **APC:** We offer expert symptom management and work with your care team to adjust medications and treatment plans, with the ability to escalate care through hospital resources if needed.

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Location of Care

Where can hospice care be provided, home, facility, inpatient unit?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Home, assisted living, nursing facilities, and inpatient unit at Christopher House
- ✓ **APC:** Home, assisted or independent living facilities, or by telehealth

If symptoms cannot be managed at home, what are the options.

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Can transition to General Inpatient level of care at Christopher House for intensive symptom management
- ✓ **APC:** Escalation typically occurs through hospital admission.

Do you have access to an inpatient hospice unit?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Yes, Hospice Austin's Christopher House is an inpatient unit specializing in symptom management by our onsite provider and 24-hour nursing care. Families and other visitors are welcome

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Communication

How will you keep our family informed and involved?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Ongoing updates, education, and real-time support for families via all members of the interdisciplinary team (nursing staff, bath aides, social worker, chaplain, and physician or nurse practitioner). Each patient has their own team with a nurse case manager.
- ✓ **APC: Communication focused on consultation visits and coordination with primary providers**

How do you coordinate with our physician or facility staff?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Hospice provider is either attending (directs care) or consulting, working with an outside provider to care for the patient and communicating updates with facility staff if applicable.
- ✓ **APC:** Palliative care provider works in conjunction with specialists and primary care teams, not as the primary attending.

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Support for the Family

What support is available for caregivers?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Extensive caregiver education, respite options, and emotional support
- ✓ **APC:** Supportive counseling and guidance towards resources, but less hands-on caregiving support

Do you provide education on what to expect at end of life?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Yes. We proactively teach families what to expect at end of life, including physical changes, signs of active dying, and how to keep their loved one comfortable, so nothing feels unexpected or frightening.
- ✓ **APC:** We help patients and families understand what to expect as the illness progresses and support planning ahead, even while continuing treatment. Provide education on hospice and discuss the appropriate time of transition according to the patient's goals.

What bereavement services are offered and for how long?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Structured bereavement support for at least 13 months
- ✓ **APC:** No a formal bereavement program

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Quality and Experience

How long have you been serving this community?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Long-standing nonprofit hospice serving Central Texas since 1981
- ✓ **APC:** Established palliative care program integrated with hospice and community partners

What measures do you use to ensure quality care?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** End of life care focused on comfort and quality of life
- ✓ **APC:** Serious illness support for patients that have an 18-24 month or less prognosis

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Logistics and Coverage

What is covered by Medicare, Medicaid, or insurance?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Covered under Medicare Hospice Benefit, Medicaid, and most insurances, including medications and equipment
- ✓ **APC:** Billed like a specialty medical service through insurance

Are there any out of pocket costs we should expect?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Minimal to none for covered hospice services
- ✓ **APC:** Copays and deductibles may apply

How do you handle medications and medical equipment

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Medications are ordered and sent to your local pharmacy. DME equipment is delivered by our contracted Durable Medical Equipment Company
- ✓ **APC:** does not provide DME but can make recommendations to your primary care provider. Also manage medications related to symptoms associated with terminal illness.

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Cultural and Personal Preferences

How do you support cultural, spiritual, or personal wishes?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Strong focus on honoring patient wishes, cultural needs, and spiritual care
- ✓ **APC:** Focus on aligning treatment with patient goals and values

Do you have experience caring for patients with conditions like dementia or cancer?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** Extensive experience with dementia, cancer, and complex end of life care. Most of our frontline clinicians are Certified Dementia Practitioners
- ✓ **APC:** Broad experience with chronic and serious illness across disease trajectories. Many of our clinicians are Certified Dementia Practitioners

How do you honor what matters most to the patient and family?

- ✓ **Hospice Austin:** We start by asking what matters most to you, then build your care around that, not just your diagnosis. Our entire team works together to honor your goals, whether that means comfort, being at home, or supporting your family every step of the way.
- ✓ **APC:** We help you navigate serious illness by aligning your treatment with what matters most to you, so your care reflects your goals while you continue treatment.