History of the Hospice Movement
The word "hospice" originated in medieval times, a derivative of the Latin "hospes" meaning host or guest. Travel-weary crusaders on their way to the Holy Land found places of refuge in monasteries. Eventually these places of rest came to be called hospices. Because great numbers of the pilgrims were in ill health, many probably spent their last days there.

During the 1960s, Dr. Cicely Saunders began a hospice program in England which encompassed home care and an in-patient facility for the seriously ill. The first hospice in the United States was established in 1974. There are over 3,000 hospices in communities across the United States today. It is estimated that hospice programs serve over 450,000 seriously ill people and their families each year.

The Hospice Philosophy
Hospice is a special kind of care designed to provide sensitivity and support for people in the final phase of a terminal illness. Hospice care seeks to enable patients to carry on an alert, pain-free life and to manage other symptoms so that their last days may be spent with dignity and quality at home or in a home-like setting.

How Hospice Works
Hospice services are available to persons who can no longer benefit from curative treatment; the typical hospice patient has a life expectancy of six months or less. Most receive care at home. Services are provided by a team of trained professionals - physicians, nurses, counselors, therapists, social workers, aides and volunteers - who provide medical care and support services not only to the patient, but to the patient's family and caregivers. The patient is usually referred to hospice by the primary physician. Referrals can also be made by family members, friends, clergy, or health professionals.

How Hospice Differs from Other Types of Healthcare
Hospice offers palliative, rather than curative, treatment. Under the direction of a physician, hospice uses sophisticated methods of pain and symptom control that enable the patient to live as fully and comfortably as possible.

Hospice treats the person, not the disease. The interdisciplinary hospice team is made up of professionals who can address the medical, emotional, psychological and spiritual needs of the patients and their loved ones.

Hospice emphasizes quality, rather than length, of life. Hospice neither hastens nor postpones death; it affirms life and regards dying as a normal process. The hospice movement stresses human values that go beyond the physical needs of the patient.
Hospice considers the entire family (not just the patient) as the "unit of care." Patients and their families are included in the decision-making process, and bereavement counseling is provided after the death of their loved one.

Hospice offers help and support to the patient and family 24-hours-a-day, 7-days-a-week. For hospice patients and their loved ones, help is just a phone call away. Patients routinely receive periodic in-home services of a nurse, home health aide, social worker, volunteer, and other members of the hospice interdisciplinary team.

Who Pays For Hospice Care?
Studies have shown hospice care to be no more costly - and frequently less expensive - than conventional care during the last six months of life. This is because less high-cost technology is used, and family, friends, and volunteers provide much of the day-to-day patient care at home. Hospice care is a covered benefit under most private insurance plans, including HMOs and managed care organizations. In addition, hospice is a covered Medicare benefit, and in most states is a covered Medicaid benefit.

The Medicare Hospice Benefit Covers:
- Nursing services
- Physician services
- Drugs, including outpatient drugs for pain relief and symptom management
- Physical, occupational, and speech-language therapy
- Home health aide and homemaker services
- Medical supplies and appliances
- Short-term inpatient care, including respite care
- Medical social services
- Spiritual, dietary, and other counseling
- Continuous care at home during periods of crisis
- Trained volunteers
- Bereavement services

Hospices also rely upon grants and community support for both donations and volunteer staff.