

8 Ways Hospices Can Support Home Funeral Families

For many families, taking care for a loved one after death can be a natural extension of the care provided during the last months or weeks on hospice service. However long friends and family have lived with knowing that the death would eventually occur, there is a lull between what we know intellectually and what we can absorb emotionally. Transitioning from death vigil to funeral vigil gives families time to acknowledge that their work is done, that they did it well, and that they didn't let their loved one down. Despite the intensity and uncertainty of that time period,

continuing to care—bathing, shampooing hair, dressing, and all the many small acts of compassion carried out for the final time by familiar, loving hands—is an unexpected gift to the living as well as the dead.

Families wishing to slow the pace after the death are looking for partnership with the same people who helped them through what is often a physically and emotionally trying period for the caregivers as well as the patient. There are ways that hospice staff can be of service outside the standard practices without making exorbitant demands on time or duties.

Here's how hospice staff can help:

- 1) Ask families on admission if they would like to explore funeral options rather than asking what funeral home to call
- 2) Provide information if solicited
- 3) Offer connections to home funeral resources
- 4) Recognize the family's legal right to have a home funeral
- 5) Demonstrate confidence in the family to care for their own dead
- 6) Expedite processing of the death certificate
- 7) Assist next-of-kin in getting the death certificate signed by the doctor responsible
- 8) Assist with body care, if invited

