

Circle Of Life: Cancer Education and Wellness

for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities



American Cancer Society Circle Of LifeSM
Cancer Education and Wellness for American Indian and Alaska Native Communities

Wellness along the Cancer Journey:
Nearing the End Of Life

Revised October 2015



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WELLNESS ALONG THE CANCER JOURNEY: NEARING THE END OF LIFE

Goals: People taking part will understand the legal issues that need to be addressed before the end of life. They will also understand some common emotional, physical, and social issues as a person nears the end of life.

Learning Objectives:

- What is hospice care and how is it given as the end of life nears.
- How are someone's health care wishes honored if they can no longer speak for themselves?
- What are some of the legal issues that need to be taken care of at the end of life?
- What is the grieving process?



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Chapter 1: Module Overview



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Module Overview

Many patients and family members have questions about what they might expect during the last few months of life. The information in this guide may help them understand what to expect both physically and emotionally during that time. Hopefully, it will help a person who is terminally ill to live fully and get the most out of this last phase of life.

The guide is written with the person who has cancer in mind, but it can be helpful to the people who care for, love, and support someone with advanced cancer, too. The information can also be applied to other illnesses such as heart disease, stroke, and diabetes. Use the guide to get answers to questions and concerns about this very sensitive and difficult time.

Hospice care will be discussed in this module. It is a philosophy of care that is often used near the end of life. Hospice recognizes death as the final stage of life. It seeks to allow people to be alert and pain-free and to help manage other symptoms as the end of life approaches. Most hospice care is given in the home. The goal is that a person's last days may be spent with dignity and comfort, surrounded by their loved ones.

It is important for the person with cancer to think about what kind of medical care they want as the end gets closer. A person with cancer and their family need to know that it may not be enough to just tell their family what their wishes are for their care. The person with cancer can choose the kind of treatment they get (aggressive, comfort care, or even none). They can also refuse any treatment that they do not want. The guide will talk about getting the care a person might want by using advance directives like the living will and health care power of attorney. It will also go over how and why a person might want to draft a will.