

Hospice Volunteer FAQs

Q: Why are volunteers important for West River Hospice?

A: Volunteers are an integral part of the hospice team and provide patients, caregivers and family members with support during this important and stressful time. Care giving for loved ones with a life-limiting illness can be exhausting. Volunteers offer opportunities for companionship, assistance or a much needed break (respite). Additionally, hospice care is a certified Medicare benefit and it is the only Medicare benefit that mandates volunteers be part of the hospice program.

Q: How long is the training program?

A: Volunteer training times vary because some of it is done at your own pace. Typically training is 10-16 hours, broken up over a period of weeks or months. Some training can be done on-line and other trainings are conducted in person.

Q: What topics are covered during the training?

A: In addition to gaining an overall understanding of the hospice philosophy, volunteers will receive instruction in the roles of the hospice team members, including the patient's physician, hospice physician, nurse, social worker, spiritual care counselor, certified home health aides and trained volunteers. Volunteer responsibilities will be discussed so that each individual can make their own decision about the service they are able to provide.

Q: Other than visiting patients and their families, how else may I be of service as a hospice volunteer?

A: As a volunteer, you will work closely with the hospice team to provide respite for the caregiver and/or companionship for the patient. Help is also necessary at the West River Hospice office for projects such as phone calls, mailings or assisting with grief support. Volunteers may also participate in Services of Remembrance by sharing reading or musical talent. We welcome hospice volunteers bringing special skills that might benefit our patients such as music, massage therapy, pet therapy, Reiki, or hair styling.

Q: I am not interested in working directly with patients. Am I still required to attend the entire training program?

A: Yes. Training not only provides volunteers with a better understanding of how patients are treated and the spectrum of care provided through our hospice program, but also ensures that they are prepared to visit patients immediately should their interests change.

Q: After completing the training program, how much time must I commit as a volunteer?

A: There are no set volunteer schedules at West River Hospice. It all depends on the needs of the patient and the availability of the volunteer. Volunteer services are flexible and can work around most schedules. Working in cooperation with our Volunteer Manager, you decide the number of hours and schedule that works best for all involved. One hour per week is encouraged.

Q: Will I ever be required to assist with a patient's physical needs?

A: Our hospice interdisciplinary team includes certified home health aides who provide each patient with necessary personal care assistance. We want our volunteers to feel confident when it comes to the interaction with the patient/family and will not expect you to provide care for which you are not comfortable and/or trained to provide.

Q: As a new hospice volunteer, what kind of support will I receive from West River Hospice?

A: The Volunteer Manager is responsible for training, supervising, scheduling and supporting our volunteers. Hospice team members are also available to the volunteer by phone or in the office. Our volunteers stay connected and supported through meetings, educational in-services, phone calls, newsletters and more.

Q: Will I ever be expected to be present when a patient dies?

A: Being present at the death of a patient is a very personal and individual choice made by the volunteer and the patient/family. Our hospice offers to keep vigil and be present at the time of death if the family requests this support. Since death is often sudden or unpredictable, it is possible that you may be present.

Q: What type of environment will I be working in?

A: Hospice care can be provided anywhere the patient calls home, including skilled nursing and assisted living facilities. We attend to our patients wherever they live. If you are providing support other than patient and family care, you will work at the West River Hospice office located at 63 Kendrick Street in Needham, MA.