

## **Plan for Medical Hospice Services**

### **1<sup>st</sup> Choice Home Health Care, Inc.**

1st Choice Home Health Care, Inc. (1<sup>st</sup> Choice) was locally established in 1995, is Medicare/Medicaid certified and the 1st and only nationally accredited home healthcare in the State of Alaska. This team has consistently provided our communities of Cooper Landing, Sterling, Soldotna, Kenai, Nikiski, Kasilof, Clam Gulch, and Ninilchik with quality home healthcare services over the past 24 years.

### **Service Lines Evolving**

We have and are continuing to experience a marked increase of older patients that are chronically/terminally ill and have signed 'Comfort One' programs wishing to die in their homes, while others who are equally as ill, elect not to have the Comfort One in place. This has resulted in a dramatic increase of comfort care needs via our home healthcare services and now is extending through the end of our patients' lives.

1<sup>st</sup> Choice has daily requests from community members and providers to provide a formal Medical Hospice Program. There are currently no professional medical hospice services available south of Anchorage on the Kenai Peninsula. The local Volunteer Hospice services provide truly caring and appreciable handholding support, but are incapable of providing Medicare hospice benefits with resources and medical interventions.

### **Medical Hospice Services and Goals**

The values and goals of a medical hospice are markedly different from those of home healthcare. The focus is no longer on curing and improvement, but rather timely medically skilled assessments and interventions via an attentive, caring, collaborative, and multidisciplinary specialty group to patients and their families/friends, in their terminal illness progression through their end-of-life process and associated bereavement for 13 months for their

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loved ones.

Our amazing staff has a heart and passion for hospice, for patients, caregivers and family members. Our team is passionately centered in providing the best care during this often difficult time to those we are fortunate to serve in our community.

With cooperation from the Kenai Peninsula Borough and other organizations, 1st Choice plans on obtaining a provisional state license for medical hospice services within the next 1 to 3 months. Following successful initial state survey, 1st Choice will apply for Medicare certification with plans to provide local medical hospice services within 3 to 6 months in the Soldotna and Kenai areas before spreading to a larger service area on the Kenai Peninsula.

### **Planning for Services**

I and our team want to provide these critically needed services so that people can die at home comfortably and have the knowledge of what to expect alleviating fear and anxiety while surrounded by support for themselves, family, and friends as they make their final transition. We want to create a loving, caring, and empathetic environment for our own community members in need of a safe and financially responsible service.

However, there is a risk of developmental or service delays if contractual agreements cannot be met or staffing resources are not in place. But, by staying current and collaborating as a team, we can excel at coordinating a care continuum in our community.

### **Marketing**

A large focus will need to be placed on alerting our communities that these services will be available as well as physician and nurse practitioner education for referrals/requirements. We would be very interested in community support for educational seminars on medical hospice, grant writing, and advertising.

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Since there are no hospice services, as described here offered locally, and the Volunteer Hospice services that we do have are intermittently available based on the number of gracious volunteers and their availability, as well as our patients' and families' needs, there is a strong need for these services in our KPB. We may also possibly be able to support our tourist population if there are predictable and staffed services available to them, as they then wouldn't have to travel to a larger city or another state to receive these benefits. Conversely, patients that are receiving hospice services in other cities or states would be able to come to our community to visit family members and/or spend the summer and continue to receive those services. By doing this, patients would no longer be bound to a specific service area and do currently have the option, per Medicare regulations, to transfer one time during each election period.

We can embrace this opportunity by realizing the huge need for hospice care and collaborate to provide, manage and support this service while marketing its value with education. With both home healthcare and medical hospice services in place, we will be able to focus on taking care of our community members health, while honoring their wishes, resulting in better outcomes and benefits for our community at large.