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Is hospice really about dying?

By Kristopher Stice - Special to the Argus Observer

Hello all! My name is Kristopher Stice. I am the director of Human Resources for Heart 'n Home Hospice & Palliative Care, LLC. I've been with Heart 'n Home since its inception in March of 2004. Each month I will be writing this column with the intent of informing you, the public, of hospice and its benefits.

Hospice is a set of services that we all may need someday — if not for ourselves, for our parents. While death is not optional for any of us, we do have choices about the services we use at the end of life. Hospice is, without a doubt, the best option in the last months of life because it offers a whole variety of benefits, not only to those of us who are dying, but also to those we leave behind.

Yet, despite its many advantages, hospice is still a mystery to most Americans, 25 years after its introduction to this country.

That hospice remains a mystery is due in part to our society's resistance to discuss matters related to death. We, as Americans, seem to think that we are invincible; death is not an option. A National Hospice Foundation research on end-of-life care found this manner of thinking to be accurate. The study revealed that Americans are more willing to talk about safe sex and drugs with their children than to discuss end-of-life care with their terminally ill parents. It is this lack of communication that leaves people unprepared for the physical, spiritual and emotional strains caused by terminal illnesses.

The good news is hospice can help. We are specialists in end-of-life care. Hospice providers are committed to the idea that hospice isn't about dying; it's about living and making each journey the best it can be. It's about living life to its fullest, up to the final moment. It's about receiving comfort and care. It's about surrounding yourself and your loved ones with medical, emotional and spiritual support.

Hospice doesn't give you the power to shorten or prolong life, just the power to live it as you choose, to be at home, if you wish, to be pain-free, to be comforted and cared for. This is the essence of what hospice is. This is what we want people to understand. And this is why we love what we do.

You know, a hospice patient once grabbed a nurse by the cheek and said, "Don't you ever forget what a privilege it is to walk someone to the gates of eternity. It is a privilege not a right." This patient couldn't have been more precise. It is a privilege and a great honor to serve these people in their homes wherever that may be.

It is for this reason I'm writing this column, to help everyone understand hospice. If you need the help, please get it. It will be one of the best decisions you could ever make for you and your loved one.

If you have any questions or concerns please feel free to call me or the staff at Heart 'n Home Hospice & Palliative Care, LLC, at our Fruitland office, (208) 452-2663, Baker City office, (541) 524-7688, Caldwell office, (208) 454-0262, or Emmett office, (208) 365-2099. You can e-mail me at kstice@gohospice.com, or visit National Hospice & Palliative Care Organization Web site: www.nhpco.org.