

# Hospice Medication Management at End of Life: Why Clinical Expertise and Medication Access Matter

Explore how effective hospice medication management enhances patient comfort and supports caregivers, ensuring timely access to essential medications at end of life.

BetterRX

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## THE SHORT ANSWER

Hospice medication management helps ensure that patients receive medications that support comfort, relieve distressing symptoms, and align with their goals of care. It involves much more than prescribing medications—it requires ongoing clinical assessment, medication review, pharmacist expertise, and coordination with pharmacy partners to help patients receive needed medications when they need them.

At BetterRX, we believe comfort requires two essential elements: the right clinical decisions and reliable medication access. Even the most appropriate medication plan cannot support a patient if avoidable barriers delay access to symptom relief.

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## What Is Hospice Medication Management?

Hospice care focuses on improving quality of life for patients with serious illness while supporting the people who care for them. Medication management plays an important role by helping relieve symptoms, reduce treatment burden, and support patient-centered goals of care.

Hospice medication management includes:

- Selecting medications based on the patient's symptoms and goals
- Adjusting medications as conditions change
- Reviewing whether each medication continues to provide meaningful benefit
- Simplifying medication regimens when appropriate

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- Supporting caregivers with medication administration
  - Coordinating medication-related needs across the interdisciplinary team & pharmacy partners

Every medication plan is individualized based on the patient's condition, symptoms, allergies, kidney and liver function, ability to swallow, level of consciousness, and preferred route of administration.

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## **Why Hospice Medication Management Matters**

As illness progresses, medication needs can change quickly. A medication that was appropriate earlier in an illness may later provide limited benefit, create unnecessary burden, or require adjustment due to changes in swallowing ability, organ function, or overall condition.

Effective hospice medication management helps teams:

- Improve comfort and quality of life
- Anticipate changing symptoms
- Reduce unnecessary medication burden
- Simplify medication administration
- Support caregivers managing medications at home or in care facilities
- Coordinate medication changes across the hospice interdisciplinary team

High-quality hospice care is proactive, not reactive. Anticipating medication needs and addressing potential challenges before they become urgent can help prevent avoidable symptom crises and reduce distress for patients, families, and caregivers.

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## **Medication Management Begins With a Comprehensive Review**

Many patients entering hospice have complex medication regimens developed over years of managing chronic conditions. Hospice medication review helps determine which medications continue to support comfort and which may no longer align with the patient's goals.

As goals of care evolve, clinicians may consider:

- Continuing medications that provide meaningful symptom benefit
- Adjusting doses based on changing clinical needs
- Changing dosage forms or routes when swallowing becomes difficult
- Discontinuing medications intended primarily for long-term disease prevention when appropriate

This thoughtful process, known as deprescribing, can reduce medication burden and allow patients and caregivers to focus on comfort-centered care.

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Medication review is not a one-time event. It should continue throughout the hospice journey as symptoms, function, and care needs change.

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## **The Role of Hospice Pharmacists**

Hospice medication management is a collaborative effort involving physicians, advanced practice providers, nurses, pharmacists, caregivers, and other members of the interdisciplinary team.

A hospice pharmacist provides specialized medication expertise to help clinicians:

- Optimize symptom management plans
- Support opioid selection, dosing, and conversions
- Identify medication interactions and potential adverse effects
- Recommend alternatives during medication shortages
- Evaluate dosage forms and administration routes
- Support deprescribing decisions
- Help address medication-related barriers before they affect patient care

By combining medication expertise with close collaboration across the care team, pharmacists help support safe, effective, and individualized symptom management.

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## **Why Timely Medication Access Matters**

Hospice clinicians use medications to address common sources of distress, including:

- Pain
- Shortness of breath
- Anxiety and agitation
- Nausea and vomiting
- Excess respiratory secretions

Medication selection depends on the individual patient and may vary based on symptom severity, underlying conditions, medication history, organ function, and ability to take medications.

Comfort medications are an important part of hospice care, but effective symptom management extends beyond the medication itself. The right medication must also be appropriately selected, monitored, and available when needed.

A carefully designed medication plan can only provide comfort if patients are able to access those medications when needed.

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Medication access may involve multiple steps, including prescribing, pharmacy communication, medication processing, dispensing, and delivery coordination. Delays or communication gaps during these steps can create additional distress for patients, caregivers, and hospice teams.

Improving medication access may help reduce:

- Uncontrolled symptoms
- Caregiver uncertainty and anxiety
- Administrative burden for hospice nurses
- Repeated follow-up calls related to medication issues
- Avoidable disruptions in care

Supporting timely access to comfort medications is an important component of responsive hospice care.

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## **How Hospice Technology Supports Medication Management**

Hospice organizations often coordinate medications across multiple pharmacies, care settings, and communication channels. Hospice-focused technology can help streamline these workflows by improving communication, supporting prescription management, and providing greater visibility into medication-related processes.

Useful capabilities may include:

- Hospice-specific prescribing workflows
- Visibility into prescription status and medication workflows
- Identification of prescription issues requiring follow-up
- Coordination between hospice teams and pharmacy partners
- Medication utilization reporting
- Electronic medical record integration
- Centralized communication tools

BetterRX was built specifically for hospice medication management. The platform combines technology, pharmacy coordination, and clinical pharmacy expertise to help hospice organizations manage medication workflows and reduce avoidable barriers to patient care.

By improving coordination and reducing time spent resolving medication-related issues, hospice teams can spend more time caring for patients and supporting families.

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## **Compassionate Care When It Matters Most**

Medication management is one of the many ways hospice teams improve quality of life for patients living with serious illness. When medications are thoughtfully selected, regularly

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reassessed, and accessible when needed, patients may experience more consistent symptom relief and families may have greater peace of mind.

BetterRX helps hospice organizations support medication management through a combination of clinical pharmacy expertise, hospice-specific technology, and pharmacy coordination. Because every patient deserves compassionate, responsive care—and no one should experience unnecessary suffering because a medication needed for comfort was difficult to access.

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