



**Hospice
Action
Network**

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WHO WE ARE

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) is the largest membership organization representing hospice and palliative care programs and professionals in the United States. We represent over 4,000 hospice programs that care for the majority of hospice patients in the US. NHPCO is committed to improving end-of-life care and expanding access to hospice so that individuals and families facing serious illness, death, and grief will experience the best care that humankind can offer.

Medicare Patient Access to Hospice Act

Background

The hospice attending physician is an important member of the hospice inter-disciplinary team. The attending physician certifies a patient's terminal prognosis, directs symptom management, prescribes appropriate treatment, and manages the patient's plan of care in collaboration with others. The hospice attending physician can be either the patient's long-standing primary care provider or a hospice provider.

Physician Assistants and Hospice

The shortage of primary care providers is creating a concomitant shortage of hospice attending physicians. Moreover, Medicare allows only physicians and nurse practitioners to serve as a patient's hospice attending physician. Physician assistants - who are licensed, certified health care providers who are explicitly trained in the area of primary care - are currently prohibited from serving as the hospice attending physician.



115,000

Certified PAs nationwide.



300%

Number of PAs increased 300% between 2011 and 2014.

This prohibition creates a significant burden for hospices and patients alike. In many communities - especially rural and underserved communities - hospices cannot find enough primary care providers to meet the demand. Further, patients who receive primary care from a PA prior to their hospice election must give up that provider when they elect hospice. This can cause significant stress for patients at an already difficult time.

The Solution

The *Medicare Patient Access to Hospice Act* (H.R. 1284), introduced in the U.S. House of Representatives by Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins (R-KS) and Congressman Mike Thompson (D-CA) allows PAs to serve as the attending physician to hospice patients and perform other functions that are otherwise consistent with their scope of practice. This legislation will remove a barrier in current law that restricts patients' access to the hospice attending physician of their choice.

“For years, the number of primary care physicians has been declining in more remote areas and this bill would help combat the problem so that some of the most vulnerable...Americans get the healthcare they deserve.” -Congresswoman Lynn Jenkins

For more information on this legislation, contact Sharon Pearce at spearce@nhpco.org.