

Script – Broadcast – President Carter celebrates 100th birthday while in hospice

INTRO

Former President Jimmy Carter reached a significant achievement this week when he turned 100 on October 1. What makes Carter's milestone birthday even more impressive is that he's lived the past 19 months while in hospice care. According to the National Institutes of Health, more than 90% of patients who enter hospice care die within the first six months. About 36% of patients die within a week of entering hospice. But Carter has defied the odds.

Hospice experts agree that Carter's extended stay in hospice has sparked plenty of discussion on the topic of end-of-life care. Sarah Whelan, MD, the medical director for OSF Hospice and Outpatient Palliative Care, Rockford, Illinois, says many people put off hospice care until it's too late.

((SOS))

Sarah Whelan, MD, medical director, OSF Hospice and Outpatient Palliative Care

"President Carter's hospice process has really opened a lot of doors for conversation, and it really is about conversation. Many people feel that once you go on hospice care, the end is near. It's a few days away, or maybe a few weeks. I think it (President Carter) is really helping to dispel one of the biggest myths with hospice care – that you're imminently dying if you go on hospice care. But that's not the case in all situations." (:28)

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According to the [National Care Planning Council](#), there are about 3,200 hospice programs in the U.S. that serve 1 million Americans a year during their final days and months.

Hospice is covered by private insurance, Medicare and Medicaid. For people who continue to live past the six-month mark, a hospice medical director or hospice doctor will need to recertify them every two to three months for insurance to continue covering the cost of care. Dr. Whelan says she's cared for patients who've lived as long as two years in hospice.

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While hospice won't change the eventual outcome, the true benefit of hospice is the support the patient and loved ones need during those crucial last days, weeks or months.

((SOS))

Sarah Whelan, MD, medical director, OSF Hospice and Outpatient Palliative Care

"As a hospice doctor, I feel that everybody should be in hospice care at the end of life," says Dr. Whelan. "The actual dying process itself often has symptoms that can be managed to allow for comfort for the patient, but also comfort for the family." (:13)