

# Hospice Administrators



## Occupational Brief Title Codes:

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## Work Classification Based Related

### D.O.T. Occupations:

- Community Organization Directors
- Hospital Administrators
- Nursing Home Administrators
- Red Cross Executive Directors

## Interests Based Related

### G.O.E. Occupations:

- Emergency Medical Services Coordinators
- Medical Record Administrators
- Nursing Service Directors
- Radiology Administrators
- Volunteer Services Directors

## Skills Based Related

### O\*NET Occupations:

- Administrative Services Managers
- Education Administrators, Elementary and Secondary School
- First-Line Supervisors, Administrative Support
- First-Line Supervisors, Customer Service
- Management Analysts

## Noteworthy Quote:

*"Being a hospice administrator provides a challenging opportunity to bring together all of a healthcare executive's skills and talents in the unique world of caring for the terminally ill. All of the administrator's abilities are used as the administrator takes on the varied roles he or she faces daily: meeting the needs of patients and families, supervising clinical and administrative staff, planning for the future of the organization, and leading the organization in various day-to-day management activities."*

**Ken Drees, Technical Assistance Director, NHPCO, Alexandria, Virginia**

**Hospice administrators** ('hos-pice ad'min-is-tra-tors) manage hospice programs that offer physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual support to dying patients and their families and care givers.

Hospice is a way of caring for terminally ill people. Too often dying people spend their final days in fear, pain, and loneliness. Hospice helps these people live the remainder of their lives as fully and as comfortably as they can. It also gives encouragement and support to family members and those caring for the patients. Hospices offer the services of physicians, nurses, clergy, home health aides, social workers, dietitians, and therapists. With the help of hospice, patients can meet death with comfort, peace, and dignity.

Formal modern hospice care is only slightly more than thirty-five years old. The first modern hospice began in England when Dame Cicely Saunders opened St. Christopher's Hospice in London in 1967. Seven years later, in 1974, the first hospice in the United States opened in New Haven, Connecticut. Since then, the number of hospice programs has increased dramatically. Few health concepts have won acceptance as quickly as hospice. This is due, in part, to the fact that hospice care is less costly than standard hospital care. It has gained tremendous support from private insurance companies and Medicare. Today, thousands of hospice programs are in operation throughout the United States.

Hospice programs vary in size and in organization. Some small hospice programs consist of only lay and professional volunteers. Large hospice organizations serve many patients and, generally, have large paid staffs in addition to volunteers. Most hospice care in the United States takes place in the homes of the patients. However, hospice programs may be conducted in hospitals, nursing



*Hospice administrators manage programs that offer physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual support to dying patients and their families.* Photo by Amy Elliott

homes, or in other inpatient accommodations. Administrators of hospice programs plan, organize, coordinate, direct, and supervise the services of the paid staff and volunteers.

### **Work Performed**

Working closely with a governing board, hospice administrators set policies, make plans, and manage people, services, training programs, budgets, and records. The administrators are also in charge of the related branches of the hospice. They either carry out their duties directly, or they assign tasks to others. They work closely with volunteers, physicians, nurses, other specialists, and hospital and other health care facility administrators. Together, they see that every patient gets the best possible care.

Many hospice programs may have one or two administrators. They are in overall charge of the entire program. Large hospice organizations may employ several administrators who serve as *departmental heads*. They are in charge of a specific department such as medical services, budgets, social services, admissions, volunteers and their training, pastoral counseling, bereavement (grief) counseling, accounting, community awareness, or fund raising. Often, to coordinate all these different departments there is an *executive director* who serves as the *chief administrator*.

Administrators meet with staff regularly to monitor patient care and progress. They recruit, select, supervise, and evaluate employees. They oversee and coordinate the work of staff. They set their salaries within certain guidelines. If necessary, they may discharge a staff member.

As part of a team, the administrators help evaluate the needs and wishes of the patients and care givers. To be a candidate for hospice, a person should know that he or she has no more than six months to live. Often a physician, nurse, family member, or friend has suggested hospice to the patient.

Another major duty of administrators is to ensure that the hospice and its services comply with federal, state, and local laws and rulings. Administrators must understand and deal with government agencies, private health insurance providers, and Medicare. Records, forms, and required documentation must always be accurate and up-to-date.

With the help of staff, administrators plan current and future program needs. They oversee the purchase of office and medical supplies and equipment. They oversee arrangements for mail, phone, laundry, and other services for both program operations and patients. Hospice administrators also develop the yearly budget for the program which they must present to the governing board for approval. They may also submit monthly financial reports.

Although much of the income of hospice programs comes from insurance payments, they seldom cover all costs. Administrators must find other sources of income to meet the payroll and office costs. Thus, fund-raising is an important part of the program.

Hospice administrators may serve as managers of public relations and community education. They keep in touch with civic and business groups. Hospice administrators frequently act as public speakers. By talking to local groups, they educate the public about hospice services. These talks also encourage private individuals and groups to donate time, money, equipment, or services. Administrators may also write articles for newsletters or newspapers to keep hospice programs in the public eye.

Administrators sometimes travel to attend regional or state hospice meetings. Through these meetings administrators learn of improvements in patient care and changes in laws affecting hospices.

### **Working Conditions**

Hospice administrators work from an office, possibly shared with an administrative assistant who takes care of much of the routine work. Although most offices have computers, a fax machine, and a photocopier, furnishings and equipment are usually basic, since cost is a vital concern.

Administrators may spend much of their time away from the office. Meetings with physicians may take place in their offices. They may conduct training sessions for volunteers in church social rooms, schools, or hospital meeting rooms.

Administrators spend about two thirds of their time working with people. The remaining third is spent working with budgets and plans.

### **Hours and Earnings**

Hospice administrators try to work a regular forty-hour weekly schedule, but most work well over that. Their hours often vary day-to-day and from week-to-week. Administrators are often on call to help patients, care givers, and staff. How often they serve directly in emergencies depends on the size of the hospice. In a small hospice program, administrators are likely to serve in more capacities. All hospice programs promise help at any time of the day or night.

According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, in 2000, medical and health services managers earned an average of \$61,640 a year. Listed earnings ranged from a low of \$35,210 a year to a high of \$97,900 a year. Most earnings fell between \$44,460 and \$72,550 a year. There are no exact figures for hospice administrators, but the median earning of administrators of health and allied services, not elsewhere classified, was \$51,800 a year.

Earnings for hospice administrators vary with the level of responsibility, as well as the type, size, and location of the facility. Small hospice programs may have volunteer administrators. Some programs only pay a token salary. Salaries for paid hospice administrators often range from about \$20,000 to \$70,000 a year. Most administrators earn

salaries in the lower figures of this range. Those receiving top earnings generally direct large programs in California, Florida, or the Northeast.

Most paid administrators also get fringe benefits. These may include paid vacations and holidays, sick leave, and life and health insurance. Large hospices may offer tuition reimbursement and pension plans.

### **Education and Training**

Those planning to become hospice administrators should begin preparing in high school by taking a college preparatory program. They should take courses in speech/communications, computer science, business, mathematics, health, social studies, government, and English. Volunteer work in the health care field is also helpful.

Hospice administrators may be members of different professions. Most are former hospital administrators, nurses, social workers and clergy. Administrators should have at least a bachelor's degree from an accredited college or university, but a master's degree is preferred. The major field of study should be health services administration, public or business administration, nursing, or a related field. Candidates for this work should also have at least two years of experience in the health care field. Beyond that, they should have held an administrative position for at least one year.

According to the Accrediting commission on Education for Health Services Administration, in 2001, 67 schools had accredited programs leading to the master's degree in health services administration. Graduate programs generally include course work in hospital organization and management, marketing, accounting and budgeting, human resources administration, strategic planning, health economics, and health information systems. Many also include up to one year of supervised experience in administrative work. Courses in social work, business administration, public speaking, computer science, English, psychology, and nursing are also useful.

Departmental administrators in a large hospice must have a specific educational background. Medical directors must be physicians. Financial managers should have a master's degree in business administration. Directors of social services should have a master's degree in social work. Directors of nursing should have a master's degree in nursing and a license to practice in the state.

### **Licensing and Professional Societies**

Hospice administrators who are physicians or nurses, and who offer their services in that capacity must be licensed and registered to practice their profession.

Hospice administrators may belong to any of a number of associations which represent and promote hospice and palliative care programs and professionals. The Hospice

Association of America (HAA) represents more than 2,800 hospices and thousands of care givers and volunteers who serve terminally ill patients and their families. There is also the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) which has a membership of over 4,000 individuals and more than 2,000 provider members. Both HAA and NHPCO are committed to improving end of life care and expanding access to hospice care. They also offer educational and technical resources and materials for both the public and professionals, hold conferences and meetings, monitor governmental regulatory activities, and advocate for hospice care, the terminally ill, and their families.

### **Personal Qualifications**

Hospice administrators should be caring persons, and they should enjoy working with people. They should be sensitive to the needs of the patients and care givers, as well as to those of the staff. Tact and interpersonal skills are important in dealing with both staff and patients. Flexibility is also important to deal with interruptions and emergencies. Administrators should be able to remain calm and in control in all circumstances.

Hospice administrators should be self-starters and able to take responsibility. They must be able to sift information from many sources in order to make decisions. Good organizational and money management skills are important. They should also have leadership ability in order to motivate and get cooperation from staff.

Occupations can be adapted for persons with disabilities. Persons should contact their school or employment counselors, their state office of vocational rehabilitation, or their state department of labor to explore fully their individual needs and requirements as well as the requirements of the occupation.

### **Where Employed**

Hospice administrators work throughout the United States. Their offices may be in a hospital or in a building in the downtown section of a city. Even though many programs serve rural regions, the office is usually in the largest town central to the district.

Many hospice programs are located in communities where there are other alternative health care facilities. Hospice is also more predominant in areas where large groups of retired people gather, such as the Sunbelt.

### **Employment Outlook**

Hospital care and the prolonging of life by artificial means is costly, and for many, unacceptable. Hospice offers an alternative. It is a growing field and the prospects for those who enter it are good. Each year the number of patients helped by hospice care increases. The demand is also spurred by the progressively increasing number of elderly people in this country. A growing trend is for

hospice programs to expand and merge into larger ones. These expansions are creating a demand for administrators.

### Entry Methods

Volunteer work is the foundation of hospice. Those thinking of a career in hospice should consider serving in some capacity as a volunteer. This experience will give them insight into hospice work and will help them decide whether this kind of work is what they want to do. Many in hospice work choose this occupation because they experienced the death of a family member who had the services of hospice.

New graduates with a bachelor's degree in health administration generally begin as administrative assistants or assistant department heads. Those with a master's degree in health administration often start as department managers or staff employee supervisors. College placement services can help graduates find their first job with a hospice or other health care agency. Internship experience in this kind of work is also an excellent start to a position in hospice administration. Hospice programs also conduct independent searches for administrators.

### Advancement

Hospice administrators can advance in several ways. Administrators may leave a small hospice to become an assistant director in a large hospice. In time they may become executive directors of large agencies. Some hospice administrators leave hospice care to become hospital administrators.

As the number of hospice programs increases, and as they serve more people, supervising directors will be required to administer state and federal agencies. Administrators with an understanding of hospice will also be in demand in private and public insurance agencies.

### For Further Research

**National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization**, 1700 Diagonal Road, Suite 625, Alexandria, VA 22314. Web site: [www.nhpco.org](http://www.nhpco.org)

**Hospice Association of America**, 228 Seventh Street, SE, Washington, DC 20003. Web site: [www.hospice-america.org](http://www.hospice-america.org)

**Little, Brown & Company**, Time and Life Building, 1271 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020.

*The Hospice Handbook: A Complete Guide.*

Larry Beresford with forward by Elisabeth Kubler-Ross. 165 pages. \$16.99.

**St. Martin's Press**, 175 Fifth Avenue, New York, NY 10010.

*When Evening Comes: The Education of a Hospice Volunteer.* Christine Andreae. 256 pages. \$23.95.

### Acknowledgments

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Ken O. Drees, Director, Technical Assistance, National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, 1700 Diagonal Road, Suite 625, Alexandria, VA 22314

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