

Questions & Answers about Hebrew SeniorLife's Approach to Jewish Hospice

Why should I choose a Jewish hospice?

At this critical time of life, you should feel comfortable that the people coming into your home to provide support understand your background and beliefs. At Hebrew SeniorLife, we have a long tradition of caring for Jewish people, and respecting and sustaining Jewish life, belief, and culture. We understand that the Jewish community is very diverse, and it is our mission to be sensitive to you and your life choices. This is true whether you are Ashkenazi, Sephardic, or Mizrahi; white, brown, or black; LGBTQ; Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, or Reconstructionist; believing, atheist, secular, or simply spiritual as defined by you. Our staff want to learn about you, your family and friends, and in this way best support and help advance your wishes toward the end of life.

If you are observant, you should know that you will be cared for by a true and tested Jewish organization. We regularly work in communication and collaboration with community rabbis of all denominations if requested by our patient. Though we are able to provide care with full sensitivity to Orthodox practices and law, we follow the lead and requests of our patients and their families in all of these spiritual matters.

Doesn't Jewish tradition call for saving a life, and extending life at all costs and at all times?

Jewish tradition honors above all else the sanctity of life and the precept that everything must be done to save a life. This said, our sources also affirm that when there is no cure

The Power to Redefine Aging.



available and a person has a terminal illness or condition that is worsening there are choices to be made in their care. When death is near, we are called upon to create a peaceful environment, gather loved ones, and help a person die with dignity. Individual Jewish people may interpret this differently, and many may not follow Jewish tradition. Some are in accord with the U.S. Federal Law granting the hospice benefit, and helping a person live fully and comfortably for as long as they can, but stopping curative treatments when a physician estimates that a person has no more than six months of life still to live. Others hold that withdrawing curative measure should only be done much closer to the time of death. Hebrew SeniorLife Hospice Care staff respect these differences and are trained to have sensitivity to Jewish life and religion. Our staff supports all people in navigating the complexity that comes with the decision to shift to comfort-only measures and to stop all curative treatments or interventions.

In line with this belief in the sanctity of life, Jewish families are often accustomed to seeking out the very best in aggressive curative treatments for serious illness, and fighting hard to protect the life of a loved one or to protect one's own life. When modern medicine begins to fail a person, and there are no more options, patients and families are sometimes at a loss as to how to proceed. When there are no longer any paths for healing or treatment, patients and families often feel as though they are falling off a cliff just when a patient's remaining days are most precious. Hebrew SeniorLife's community-based hospice care can help family members and the person who is sick find medical, spiritual and emotional support during this time of heightened need to make every moment count. Hebrew SeniorLife wants the Jewish community to know that we are here to provide the very best in end-of-life care for you and your loved ones.

Does your staff have experience caring for Holocaust Survivors?

Yes, we have found that Holocaust survivors are often underserved by other hospitals and hospices as they near death, and lack the special support they need when there is emotional and interpersonal complexity. There are many issues that plague survivors in

particular that can be significantly addressed toward the end of life. People may have experienced few if any models for healthy normal aging and death. In the family, the loss of a spouse can be especially disastrous as this might be the one person with whom a survivor has shared more of their history, and they have survived together throughout the years. Our staff, chaplains, and volunteers are all sensitized to the unique background of survivors, and are honored to be able to care for these individuals.

Why is a well-trained Jewish chaplain important to hospice care?

The chaplain can be a resource for the patient and for family members whether providing caring companionship, discernment of what to expect along the way, or simply to be fully present with a person if desired as they near the end of life. The final stage of life sometimes offers opportunity for spiritual counseling. Other times, the chaplain might just provide a reassuring and caring presence. The chaplain can be an important part of a hospice team working with a person's family, friends, and caregivers to ensure a peaceful death. Along the way there can at times be opportunities for the chaplain to play a part in helping with reconciliation with loved ones, the overcoming of fear and trepidation, and setting the stage for healthy grieving.

What about euthanasia?

The sanctity of life, and dignity of each individual are foremost in Jewish thought and in our patient care. There is a commonly held idea that hospice comes in to hasten a person's death. This is not true for Hebrew SeniorLife Hospice Care. Neither euthanasia nor physician-assisted suicide is legal in Massachusetts and it is not a part of our hospice program. People choose hospice as a way to live fully as long as possible and to die peacefully at home with no curative or life-prolonging options.

How does Hebrew SeniorLife Hospice help and support people along the way?

Jewish tradition bids us to strive to alleviate the suffering of the sick and the dying. The Hebrew SeniorLife hospice staff have a deep understanding of the Jewish cultural and spiritual approach to death and dying, medical treatments, and diverse Jewish family ritual and cultural norms around dying. We are also 100 percent respectful of your choices or the guidance of those whom you entrust with decision making. When you are in the vulnerable position of facing the end of life, we know it can be hard to trust professionals. We also know how and when to do things well, how to alleviate pain and suffering, how to ensure that the patient's wishes and values are respected, and when to gather loved ones to say goodbye. We hope you will accept our assistance and support and that we can face the challenges of this time together.

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