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Got Volunteers? Association of Hospice Use of Volunteers With Bereaved Family Members' Overall Rating of the Quality of End-of-Life Care

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Abstract

Context. Volunteers are a key component of hospice, and they are required by Medicare conditions of participation in the United States. Yet, little is known about the impact of volunteers in hospice.

Objectives. The goal of this study was to characterize whether bereaved family members in hospice programs with increased use of volunteer hours per patient day report higher overall satisfaction with hospice services.

Methods. A secondary analysis of the 2006 Family Evaluation of Hospice Care data repository with hospice organization data regarding the number of volunteer hours in direct patient care and the total number of patient days served. A multivariate model examined the association of institutional rate of bereaved family members stating end-of-life care was excellent with that of hospices' rate of volunteer hours per patient day, controlling for other organizational characteristics.

Results. Three hundred five hospice programs (67% freestanding and 20.7% for profit) submitted 57,353 surveys in 2006 (54.2% female decedents and 47.4% with cancer). Hospice programs reported on average 0.71 hours per patient week (25th percentile: 0.245 hours per patient week; 75th percentile: 0.91 volunteer hours per patient week; and 99th percentile: 3.3 hours per patient week). Those hospice programs in the highest quartile of volunteer usage had higher overall satisfaction compared with those in the lowest-quartile usage of volunteers (75.8% reported excellent overall quality of care compared with 67.8% reporting excellent in the lowest quartile. After adjustment for hospice program characteristics, hospice programs in the highest quartile had highest overall rating of the quality of care (coefficient $\frac{1}{4}$ 0.06, 95% confidence interval $\frac{1}{4}$ 0.04, 0.09).

Conclusion. In this cross-sectional study, hospice programs with higher use of volunteers per patient day were associated with bereaved family member reports that the hospice program quality of care was excellent.