

# Learning About Hospice Care

## Honoring Veterans' Lives With Compassion and Comradery

### Chester Diaz, Healthcare Studies

### Introduction

Amedisys is the largest Home Health, Hospice, Palliative, and Personal Care delivery organization in the United States.

- Over 20 thousand employees across 39 states (Amedisys, 2021a).
- Provides home health services for people recovering from illness, injury, or disease.
- Offers hospice care for those with life-limiting illness or disease.
- Offers emotion and spiritual support for patients and their families to cope with life altering conditions (Amedisys, 2021b).

As a Health and Social Services Intern, I hoped to connect with veterans and/or minorities under the care of Amedisys.

### Related Literature

The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) releases annual reports. Data from the NHPCO annual report in 2020 include:

- Over 1.5 million Medicare beneficiaries received hospice care in 2018.
- National average for hospice utilization rate of Medicare beneficiaries was 51% as of 2018.
- 48% or less than half of Massachusetts Medicare beneficiaries utilized hospice care in 2018.

#### **Hospice patient disparities**

- 82% of hospice decedents were White followed by Black (8%) and Latino (7%) in 2018.
- 56% of hospice decedents receive care at home followed by assisted living (20%), and skilled nursing facilities (17%).
- 55% of hospice decedents patients were female (NHPCO, 2020).
- The percentage of Black Medicare beneficiaries utilizing hospice care has remained static since 2018 (Eastabrook, 2021).

#### **Veterans in Hospice Care**

- In 2000, 21.6 percent of all Medicare decedents enrolled in hospice, compared with only 5 percent of veterans. The VA is working to improve veteran participation (Parker, 2021).
- "Rates of hospice utilization were higher among veterans than other Medicare decedents, according to recent research" (Vossel, 2020, para. 1).

### Internship Objectives

- To learn an interdisciplinary approach to hospice care while providing meaningful opportunities to connect with patients in the field.
- To organize, plan and/or deliver veteran recognition materials to honor veteran patients in hospice care.
- To maintain patient databases and handle various administrative tasks and special projects as needed within the agency.
- Adhere to local, state, and federal laws, COVID-19 policies and guidance, HIPAA Privacy and Security Rules.

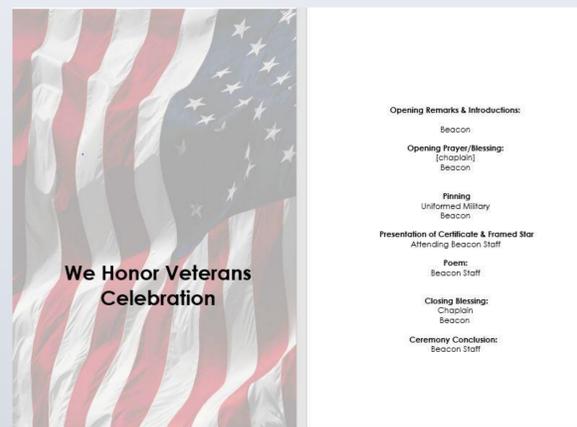
My role will help me explore careers in hospice and home health services while gaining outreach, project development, and project management experience.

### Special Project: We Honor Veterans

[www.wehonorveterans.org](http://www.wehonorveterans.org)

We Honor Veterans (WHV) is a partnership under the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO) in-collaboration with the Department of Veteran Affairs.

- Most successful collaborative program according to the NHPCO.
- Over 5,100 Hospice Partners in the U.S.
- 1438 Community-based Health Care Partners.
- 20,412 Veterans honored with pinning ceremonies (WHV, 2020).



Honor Kits. The honor kits from WHV include a framed star from a decommissioned U.S. Flag, Certificate of Appreciation, and flag pin. Other items such as blankets, stuffed animals, and cards from local partners may be presented.

### Materials and Methods

The site supervisor and I met weekly to plan my activities.

- Receive notification of veteran admissions, discharges, or transfers during morning or afternoon call-in, and/or site supervisor.
- Gather name, military branch, and period(s) of service.
- Review or request patient diagnosis and current functional status.
- Review caregiver or loved ones' information to determine best option for pinning ceremony.
- Contact caregiver and/or loved one and provide brief introduction to WHV and offer pinning.
- Collaborate with caregiver or loved ones, site supervisor, Beacon Staff, and/or local partners.
  - Veteran Service Officer (VSO).
  - Uniformed Military Representative (current member, Veteran/Retiree).
  - Elected Officials.
  - Color Guards, Honor Guards, or Junior Reserve Officer Training Corps (Jr. ROTC).
- Create and print certificates of appreciation, programs, and scripts for distribution.
- Conduct Pinning Ceremony.
- Follow up with caregivers and/or loved ones.

### Results

- Completed 2 pinning ceremonies.
- Recommended the use of Veteran Acknowledgement Cards for contacting Veterans or loved ones.
- Updated WHV Literature for bedside honor kits for rapidly declining veterans.

### Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned About Pinning Ceremonies

1. Veterans are critical to the pinning process.
  - Allows family and veteran opportunities to connect with other veterans.
  - Military attired veteran provides professionalism and honor to the ceremony.
2. We need more veterans so that we can offer any day of the week; provides flexibility for the families.
3. Initial Post cards sent to families is a valuable communication strategy.
  - Provides the family with a visual introduction of the program.
  - Acknowledges and honors the Veteran's service.
  - Offers information about the pinning ceremony in a non-threatening approach.
4. Multiple, persistent attempts to contacting the family is important. Don't take families non-responsive or rude responses personally.

### Conclusion

The goal of my project included a desire to establish or improve local partnerships between Beacon Hospice, local governments, Reserves of the Armed Forces, National Guard, and veteran's outreach to streamline pinnings. During my internship, I believe I made a difference by establishing a foundation for others to build on, with the future goal of establishing a recognized county, regional, and/or state program for pinnings. I will continue to support Beacon Hospice with the execution of Veterans' pinning ceremonies.

### References

- Amedisys. (2021a). *Leadership*. <https://www.amedisys.com/about/leadership/>.
- Amedisys. (2021b). *Why Amedisys*. <https://www.amedisys.com/services/hospice-care/why-amedisys/>.
- Eastabrook, D. (2021, June 7). *Hospice and palliative care falling short in black community*. McKnight's Senior Living. Retrieved August 8, 2021 from <https://www.mcknightsseniorliving.com/home/news/home-care-daily-news/hospice-and-palliative-care-falling-short-in-black-community/>.
- National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization (NHPCO). (2020). *NHPCO Facts and Figures* <https://www.nhpc.org/factsfigures>.
- Parker, J. (2021, March 14). *VA to expand hospice, palliative care for veterans*. Hospice News. Retrieved August 14, 2021 from <https://hospicenews.com/2019/04/09/va-to-expand-hospice-palliative-care-for-veterans/>.
- Vossel, H. (2020, October 29). *More veterans gravitating toward home-based hospice care*. Hospice News. Retrieved August 8, 2021 from <https://hospicenews.com/2020/10/29/more-veterans-gravitating-toward-home-based-hospice-care/>.
- We Honor Veterans. (2020). *2020 Annual Report*. <https://www.wehonorveterans.org/blog/2020-annual-report>.



### Acknowledgement

Tara Duplaga  
Volunteer Coordinator  
Beacon Hospice, an Amedisys Company  
[tara.duplaga@amedisys.com](mailto:tara.duplaga@amedisys.com)

