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Key Terms to Understand When Trying to Find Hospice Services

How easy or difficult this task is will depend on the resources available in your community and the particular services you need. When looking for hospice services be patient, be persistent, and be thorough. It's easier to choose a good agency if you understand certain key terms.

Licensure

In some States, hospices or the personnel they employ must be licensed to operate. The State department of health usually oversees these licenses. In either case, an agency or individual must meet basic legal and operating requirements to obtain a license. Generally these requirements do not guarantee the quality of services an agency provides. But if your State requires that an agency be licensed, failure to be licensed may indicate a problem.

Bonding

To become bonded, an agency pays a fixed dollar amount and obtains a bond that acts as a kind of insurance policy. If the consumer has a problem with the agency or its employees and sues the agency in court and wins, any court judgments awarded to the consumer can be paid from the bond.

Certification

In all States the State health department certifies hospices. A certified hospice is one that is eligible for payment by Medicare and, in some States, Medicaid hospice services. To become certified an agency must show that it meets basic Federal and State standards, where required, for financial management and patient care. However, specific standards and their enforcement vary by State.

Certified health personnel must meet the specific standards set by the national organization representing their profession. For example, the American Dietetic Association represents and certifies dietitians. The standards usually require passing a national test and/or providing proof of work experience. Social workers and therapists are among health personnel who are generally certified. Home care aides may be certified by some States. The Foundation for Hospice and Homecare offers national certification for home care aides.

In general, State licensure and certification help protect the public against unqualified health personnel working in hospice, home care, health facilities, and in private practice.

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Page 1 of 1