

Welcome to American Mosaic from VOA Learning English. This is June Simms.

When people hear the word hospice, they usually link it to death and dying. But as Marsha James tells us, hospice is focused more about providing care, comfort and support to patients during their final days of life

Faye and Wayne Payne lived a rich and interesting life before settling down in rural Virginia. But their peaceful existence was crushed when they learned that Faye had lung cancer.

The 70-year-old retired secretary went through a series of aggressive medical treatments that left her weak and underweight.

"I did the radiation, and I did the chemo, and after I had the last scan done they realized I had more cancer coming up here. And I said 'no more.'"

Faye decided to seek hospice care after talking about the future with her family and doctors. Social worker Robin Johnson is part of the hospice team that visits Faye in her home.

“The nurse is looking at the medical things and the social worker at the psycho-social spiritual things, which can encompass a lot.”

Faye Payne explains the value of her hospice care.

“They helped me realize that, yes, death is coming. And they’ve helped me get ready. I now have everything lined up and ready to go.”

Hospice care helps for family members too, like Faye’s husband.

“They come along and they take her blood pressure and check her hearing and get her medication and it’s made life a whole lot easier for both of us.”

Melissa Mills is assistant director of patient services at Hospice of the Rapidan. The organization serves terminally ill patients in several counties in the state of Virginia.

“We're all here for the same mission and that's to help our patients die with compassion and dignity.”

Seventy-four-year-old Jim Sykes learned that he had head and neck cancer two years ago. He has been receiving hospice care at home for seven months.

“I would advise anybody that needs help like this extra support, that hospice is what they need”

Lisa Stone is Jim's social worker.

“A lot of my visits are providing a lot of supportive listening. Jim has his black book of photos so we do what I like to call photo therapy.”

Eric Lindner has been a hospice volunteer since 2009 and has written about his experiences. He believes hospice provides a support system that is largely missing in American culture.

“I’ve travelled a fair bit - China, Africa, other places - and the elders are embraced and taken into the family. In this country just the way it’s developed, maybe that’s the role that hospice has tried to fill a little bit.”

That support has helped patients like Faye Payne enjoy her quality of life today. And she says when the time comes for her to leave this earth, she is ready.

“I was born July 16th, in 1942, but my dad was working on the railroad and he died April 16th, 1942, so I want to get to see my dad one day, that’s the main thing. I have no regrets and I’m not afraid.”