

## Eli's Hospice Insider

### Hospice News: Hospices Dispute Newspaper Allegations Of Gaming The Medicare Benefit

Hospices aren't taking the allegations made against the industry by the Washington Post lying down.

**Reminder:** The Post alleged that the for-profit-dominated hospice industry has been recruiting ineligible long-stay patients because they are more profitable (see Eli's Hospice Insider, Vol. 7, No. 2). The story was run widely in newspapers across the nation.

"Hospice discharges are something we celebrate," said **Bob J. Bleicher**, medical director for **HoriSun Hospice** in Lincoln, Neb., in a letter to the editor published by the Journal Star newspaper. "It is difficult to judge an individual's trajectory toward death," he added. "Hospice relieves suffering and prolongs life."

"HoriSun Hospice loses money on at least 30 percent of patients," Bleicher continued in his letter. "For every patient who enters hospice near death, the expense of providing medications, equipment and assembling all caregivers at the bedside quickly costs far more than the Medicare payment."

The Post article "could potentially ... scare people away from a service that they really need," said executives from **Hospice of Kankakee Valley** in Bourbonnais, Ill., in a letter published in the (Kankakee) Daily Journal. "There are safeguards in place to protect against the unethical practices described in the article."

"Families tell us they feel their loved ones were referred to hospice too late," stressed **Sue Ranson**, CEO of **Good Samaritan Hospice** in Roanoke, Va., in a letter to The Roanoke Times. "Almost 20 percent of our hospice families who respond to the 'Family Evaluation of Hospice Care Survey' state that they wished their loved one had had hospice care sooner."

The hospice has an average length of stay of 58 days, a live discharge rate of 13 percent, and only 7 percent of patients on service for six months or longer, Ranson said.

**The big picture:** "Hospice care represents only 2 percent of Medicare spending although hospice care is less expensive in the long run than advanced medical treatment," Ranson emphasized.