

Eli's Hospice Insider

Industry Note: Another Newspaper Puts Hospice In The Hot Seat

The latest high-profile newspaper article lambasting the hospice industry comes in the form of a column

appearing in the L.A. Times. Columnist **Steve Lopez** penned a piece detailing his mother's experience with hospice care, emphasizing missed visits and uncontrolled pain symptoms, among other deficiencies.

After five hours of uncontrolled pain and many frantic calls to the hospice, a hospice nurse told Lopez the hospice had failed his mother and it was partially due to the fact that it was a Friday discharge from the hospital, he recounts. "Money drives medical decisions, and patients sometimes suffer the consequences," he says.

After other failed promises from the hospice, Lopez' family "fired" the agency and transferred his mother to another that they were more satisfied with, he says.

Hospice "has grown into a multibillion-dollar, mostly for-profit industry, with huge national corporations dominating. Medicare now writes roughly \$17 billion a year in checks to hospice agencies," the column notes. "Recent years have seen a spate of massive Medicare billing-fraud cases against hospice agencies, and last year, the federal Office of the Inspector General released the results of an industry probe that found evidence of shoddy care, billing for services never provided and enrolling patients not eligible for hospice care."

Lopez says he plans a series on needed hospice improvements and reforms, and invites readers to contribute their hospice stories in the comments section. At press time, about 40 parties had done so, many of them relating similar difficulties.

On the bright side: Multiple commenters also related positive hospice experiences with loved ones. And Lopez acknowledges that "hospice nurses do difficult tasks with great skill and compassion."

See the column and comments at www.latimes.com/local/california/la-me-lopez-grace-20190119-story.html.