

## Eli's Hospice Insider

### **MARKETING: Start the Conversation to Get Providers and Consumers Talking About Hospice**

One hospice shares what they found works well.

The right educational approach can help providers and consumers realize that hospice can be an answer to end-of-life care needs -- not a topic to avoid discussing.

That's not to say that you don't sometimes have to break the ice to get people, including doctors, nurses, and social workers, comfortable addressing the topic. Hospice "has such a stigma attached to it that no one ever really wants to talk about it much," says **Noelle Berardi, RN**, with Samaritan Hospice in Brockton, Mass.

Yet, "the more you initiate conversation about what's going on with a provider's patients and what challenges they are facing, the easier it is to talk about hospice and end-of-life care."

Talking point: "You have to give providers some way to initiate the conversation with patients," Berardi adds. Try asking patients what they understand about their diagnosis, she suggests.

#### Additional Strategies Promote Dialogue

Educating consumers about hospice, **Carol Paprocki**, public relations manager for Samaritan, lets them know that "the hospice discussion doesn't have to flow only from the doctor down to the patient." And she assures people that simply asking about hospice doesn't commit them to anything. "We let people know to ask questions and gather information, which sometimes signals to a referral source that [he or she is] open to hearing information."

Thought-provoking question: Sometimes Paprocki will ask people in the community where their doctors would refer them if the patient has a heart problem. "And they say, a cardiologist, of course. So then we ask: Why wouldn't you want to be referred to a specialist who is appropriate for an advanced stage of illness, which is what we are? We are holistic specialists in caring for the entire person -- the emotional, physical, and spiritual aspects."

Samaritan also provides educational workshops on hospice, which hospice staff sometimes dovetails with other topics, such as advance directives. "Offering such workshops provides an opportunity to talk about what hospice is and how people can build that option into a living will," says Paprocki.

Word-of-mouth works: "Even if we have only a few people at a presentation, sometimes those people will refer us to their group to provide an informational session," Paprocki says.