



FALL 2014 NEWSLETTER

Funeral Consumers Alliance of Houston

An affiliate of the national Funeral Consumers Alliance (www.funerals.org)

Website: www.funeralshouston.org

Tel #s: 713-526-4267

If no Answer: 713-464-8877 or 713-301-8566 or leave message

To-date nearly 7,500 visitors have accessed our website www.funeralshouston.org. We welcome your feedback and comments.

Differences in Care at For-Profit Hospices

By Paula Span – The New York Times - March 3, 2014

People who pay attention to hospice care, so often a godsend for the dying and their families, have noticed and wondered about two trends in recent years:

1. What began as a grass-roots movement to improve end-of-life care is becoming a business. In 1990, only 5 % of hospices were for-profit operations; by last year, they dominated the industry, representing 63 % of hospices.
2. We've also seen that hospice patients are increasingly likely to be "disenrolled" before they die. Once, this was a rare event; the greater problem was that patients waited until the eleventh hour to enroll, subjecting themselves and their families to unnecessary stress and suffering.

Now, about 20 % of hospice patients are discharged alive, the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission has found. Some may have moved, or changed their minds about treatment, but the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization said its surveys show that hospices, not patients, initiate a great majority of discharges. In other words, patients are getting bounced as corporate bottom lines have come to matter more. Are these two developments connected? We've had our suspicions — but now we have data.

A study published recently in JAMA Internal Medicine has found that for-profit hospices have significantly higher disenrollment rates than nonprofits, among other disparities. "We've shown that differences by ownership affect patient care, services provided and the larger community," said the lead author, Melissa Aldridge, a health researcher at Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York and a veteran investigator of hospice care. Using a representative national survey of nearly 600 hospice organizations, conducted in 2008 and 2009, the team found that for-profit hospices discharged 10 percent of patients alive, and nonprofits 6 percent. These percentages, lower than those cited by the advisory commission, may have climbed since, but the association is clear.

The study revealed other differences, too. "What we see is that for-profits tend to enroll patients with longer lengths of stay," Dr. Aldridge said. They're also more likely to serve patients in nursing homes and assisted living facilities, while nonprofits are more often working in private homes.

These factors are related, Dr. Aldridge explained — and their common characteristic is increased profit. Stick with me a bit while I explain:

Medicare reimburses hospices at a fixed daily rate, regardless of how long it cares for a patient. But some days cost more than others. “The first few days, meeting with the patient and family, setting up the plan of care, these are high-intensity days,” Dr. Aldridge said. Similarly, as patients near death and hospice staffs visit more frequently, costs rise. The stable days in the middle are when for-profit hospices can make money; if there are more such days, “there’s higher profitability,” she said. The profit motive also may figure in the greater number of patients in nursing homes and assisted living who are served by for-profit hospices. Employees in these institutions already provide considerable routine care — bathing, providing meals, changing linens. And hospice staffers don’t have to travel as much as when they visit people in far-flung houses. “The cost of caring for that individual may be much less expensive” than for a patient at home, Dr. Aldridge added.

Medicare is watching all hospices, regardless of ownership, increasingly closely, and may demand repayment if their average cost of caring for patients exceeds an “aggregate annual cap”; last year’s was \$26,157.50. The patterns in this Mount Sinai/Yale study suggest that, as [the Washington Post reported in December](#), for-profit hospices aggressively recruit patients, keep them enrolled longer, then evict them when costs begin to endanger reimbursement.

It’s telling, for instance, that 22 percent of the for-profits in the sample exceeded the Medicare cap at least once in the previous five years. Only 4 percent of nonprofits did. And among the for-profits that exceeded the cap, disenrollment was even higher — 13 percent.

Hospice executives point out, correctly, that mortality is hard to predict with some terminal diseases — dementia, for instance. It’s also true that with good care, some patients improve for a while. But previous research by the Mount Sinai/Yale team shows that [cancer patients bounced from hospice died within a median of 24 days](#). “These are not people who are getting better,” Dr. Aldridge said. They’re just dying too slowly. Moreover, dumping those cancer patients from hospice actually cost Medicare money, the earlier study showed. Once discharged, they were far more likely to wind up in emergency rooms and intensive care units, at great expense. And they were more apt to die in hospitals, something they presumably hoped to avoid by seeking hospice care in the first place.

Dr. Aldridge and her colleagues looked at other differences, too. They found that for-profits are much less likely to serve as training sites for end-of-life care. “The number of trained physicians, nurses and aides in hospice and palliative care is nowhere near the amount we need” for an aging population, Dr. Aldridge said. “Hospices acting as training sites is crucial for the future.”

One possible bright spot: For-profit hospices do more outreach to low-income and minority communities, long a concern among hospice advocates. But for the terminally ill and their families, the disenrollment issue seems troubling. Some hospices now discharge 30 percent or more of their patients, withdrawing the services they’ve come to rely on. “It’s very jarring,” Dr. Aldridge said.

She suggests requiring hospices to publish their discharge rates and their reasons, perhaps on a Medicare website like [Nursing Home Compare](#).

Families sometimes don’t recognize that multiple hospices operate in most parts of the country now, and that they can choose among them. If they could determine which hospices were likeliest to bounce their patients, “we’d no longer see these substantial differences,” Dr. Aldridge said.

In the meantime, what dying person or his family wants to undertake comparison shopping? But enrolling with a nonprofit may lower the risk of being discharged from hospice three weeks before death.

[Paula Span](#) is the author of “When the Time Comes: Families With Aging Parents Share Their Struggles and Solutions.”

Please let us know if your personal information has changed. Send an email to ehillmann33@gmail.com.
Thank you!

Costs for the newsletter mailings have increased as have other day-to-day costs running the FCA Houston. Please remember that your FCA Houston organization is run by volunteers and relies on your **Donation**. Please contribute generously through PayPal or a credit card. We also continue to accept personal checks. Thank you for supporting the Funeral Consumers Alliance of Houston. Information on how to make a donation is also available on our website www.funeralshouston.org.

LIST OF COOPERATING FUNERAL HOMES in Alphabetical Order
Prices change—always call for up-to-date information

As a Comparison, Earthman Dignity Prices are Listed Following this Table

ALDINE FUNERAL CHAPEL 9504 Airline Dr., Houston, TX 77037 http://www.aldinefuneralchapel.com	281.591.6055
Direct cremation	\$ 807
Direct burial, incl. 20 gauge steel casket	\$1,598
Gravesite service, incl. 20 gauge steel casket	\$2,147
Traditional funeral, incl. service at funeral home or Houston area church with embalming/open casket and night of viewing.	\$2,895
Distance charges beyond Harris County (Galveston, Ft. Bend, Liberty, Wallace, Brazoria)	\$ 158

ALLEN DAVE FUNERAL HOME Houston, Humble, Cypress, Katy, Klein, Spring, Sugar Land, The Woodlands 2103 Cypress Landing Dr., Houston, TX 77090 Brenham, Lyons, Somerville Caldwell, Bryan & Navasota Killeen & Central Texas Harker Heights Temple, TX Shreveport, LA Email: allendaveusa@yahoo.com /Fax: 713.634.2707 Website: www.AllenDave.com	713.480.2966
Direct cremation up to 275 lbs.	\$795
Direct cremation 276 – 350 lbs. maximum	\$995
Immediate burial with basic casket (Monday – Friday only)	\$1495
Traditional funeral with service at funeral home or church, incl. visitation/viewing one hour prior to funeral, incl. embalming, basic casket (Monday – Friday only)	\$2495 - \$2995

BERESFORD FUNERAL SERVICE 13501 Alief-Clodine, Houston, TX 77082 Email: info@beresfordfunerals.com /Fax: 281.933.9094 Website: beresfordfunerals.com	281.933.9090
Direct cremation	\$1,595
Cremation with Memorial Service or other Options (please contact funeral home for information)	\$2,195 - \$5,995
Traditional funeral service – different options available.	\$3,995 - \$7,995
GREEN BURIAL: The Beresford Funeral Home uses the Carmen Nelson Bostick Cemetery in Tomball, TX, a privately owned cemetery. Please contact Beresford for information.	

CARNES FUNERAL HOME 3100 Gulf Fwy (near exit 16), Texas City, TX 77591 http://www.carnesfuneralhome.com Direct cremation (Harris County) Contact funeral home for all other prices	409.986.9900 \$ 835
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CLAIRE BROTHERS FUNERAL HOME 7901 Hillcroft St, Houston 77081-7205 Email: funeral198@aol.com /Website: www.clairebrothersrileysmith.com	713.271.7250
Direct cremation (Harris County)	\$ 675
Direct burial, 20-gauge steel casket	\$ 1290
Direct burial with graveside service	\$ 1695
Traditional funeral (20-gauge steel casket, chapel service, embalming, cosmetology)	\$ 2495
Distance charge: \$2.00/mi for distance beyond 50 miles (county exceptions) Languages spoken: English, Spanish, Cebuano, Filipino, French, Italian. Services: Protestant, Catholic, & others.	

DEER PARK FUNERAL DIRECTORS 336 E. SanAugustine St., Deer Park, TX 77536 www.deerparkfuneraldirectors.com	281-476-4693
Direct cremation (‡ Price for FCAH members)	\$ 650
Immediate burial, 20-gauge steel casket	\$ 1495
Graveside service, 20-gauge steel casket, no embalming	\$ 1920
Distance charges and available services: Contact the funeral home	
GREEN BURIAL: Basic services of funeral director & staff, refrigeration, dressing & casketing the deceased, coordination & direction of graveside service, transfer of remains to funeral home, Green Burial casket*, transfer to Green Cemetery, one grave space in Green Cemetery marker section (for upright marker section, add \$175), & Register Book. Green Cemetery is in Tranquility Oaks Cemetery in Spring. <u>This cemetery is owned by the SCI Corporation.</u>	\$ 5595
(Green Burial products are made from sustainable biodegradable materials, are metal-free, and are suitable for burial in all cemeteries, including both traditional and conservation cemeteries.)	
*Natural Burial Trundle & Shroud (instead of Green Burial casket)	\$ 4545

FOREST LAWN FUNERAL HOME & CEMETERY 8706 Almeda-Genoa Rd, Houston, TX 77075 http://www.forestlawnfuneralhomehouston.com	713.991.9000
Direct cremation	\$ 1315
Direct Cremation with Viewing, incl. service fee, embalming, 1-day visitation, removal within 40 m of funeral home, transportation to crematory, rental casket, standard cremation container, crematory fee, plastic cremains container, 1 death certificate, 20 prayer cards	\$ 3045
Direct Cremation, then Memorial Service, incl. service fee, removal within 40 m of funeral home, transportation to crematory, standard cremation container, crematory fee, plastic cremains container, memorial service, wooden urn rental for memorial service, 1 death certificate, 20 prayer cards	\$1,620

Direct Burial, incl. Gravesite Service (closed casket), incl. service fee, dressing and casketing, washing and disinfecting, gravesite service & equipment, removal within 40 m of funeral home, hearse, service vehicle, casket, outer burial container, 1 death certificate, 20 prayer cards	\$4362
Direct Burial, incl. Gravesite Service (open casket), incl. service fee, embalming, dressing & casketing, washing & disinfecting, gravesite service & equipment, removal within 40 m of funeral home, hearse, service vehicle, casket, outer burial container, 1 death certificate, 20 prayer cards	\$4807
Traditional Funeral with Gravesite Service , incl. service fee, embalming, dressing & casketing, viewing per day, gravesite service & equipment, removal within 40 m of funeral home, hearse, service vehicle, casket, outer burial container, 1 death certificate, 20 prayer cards	\$5122
Traditional Funeral with Church Service , incl. service fee, embalming, dressing & casketing, viewing per day, church service, gravesite service & equipment, removal within 40 m of funeral home, hearse, service vehicle, casket, outer burial container, police escorts, 1 death certificate, 20 prayer cards	\$5622
Distance charge, body pickup: \$2.25/mi beyond 50 miles. Languages spoken: English, Spanish, Vietnamese. Services: Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, Hindu, Buddhist, Islamic, Greek Orthodox.	

EARTHMAN HUNTERS CREEK FUNERAL HOME (SCI) 8303 Katy Freeway Houston, TX 77024 www.DignityMemorial.com	713.465.8900
Direct Cremation	\$4,395 - \$29,690
Immediate Burial	\$5,195 - \$45,490
Dignity Memorial Honor Funeral Service, complete, with outer burial container	19,190
Dignity Memorial Tribute Funeral Service	\$18,090
Caskets	\$795 - \$40,295

CEMETERY: HOUSTON MEMORIAL GARDENS 16000 Cullen Blvd, Pearland 77581 Plot, open / close grave, grave liner Prices increase due soon. Phone for new prices.	281-485-2221 \$2,300
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Houston National Cemetery
10410 Veterans Memorial Drive, Houston, TX 77038
Tel. 281-447-8686/Fax 281-447-0580/Website: <http://www.cem.va.gov/cems/nchp/houston.asp>
The cemetery has a very informative website with information on general veterans' services such as benefits and services, health and well-being, and burials and memorials, including a nationwide gravesite locator. Our national organization in Vermont has additional information on Veterans burials. Go to www.funerals.org, click on the left on Free FCA Publications, scroll down to FAQ Pamphlets, and then to Veterans Burial Benefits.

ORGAN DONATION (call or refer to website) – May save the lives up to 5 persons.
www.LifeGift.org

800-633-6562

BODY DONATION TO MEDICAL SCHOOL
Baylor College of Medicine (www.bcm.edu)
Univ. of TX Health Sciences Center ([www.uth.tmc.edu/nba/willed body](http://www.uth.tmc.edu/nba/willed%20body))
Cremation free; charges for death certificate.

713-798-3858
713-500-5603

Donations have some limitations, such as cancer, HIV / AIDs, tuberculosis, or hepatitis B/C.

LIFELEGACY.ORG

DONATION FOR HARVESTING OF BODY PARTS FOR RESEARCH, ETC.

Preferably make arrangements before death, but they can accept bodies up to 5 days after death if body has been refrigerated. Free cremation. May accept bodies with active cancer, heart disease, pulmonary disease, and Alzheimer's, as these are useful in studying these medical conditions. Check to confirm.

Body parts are sold for medical research to medical schools, etc. Some cremated remains can be returned to survivors. If arrangements to LifeLegacy have not yet been made, body can be sent to Claire Brothers Funeral Home, since they work with LifeLegacy in preparing bodies for shipment.

888-774-4438

Note:

- Listed prices do not include the costs for a death certificate or cemetery charges, unless otherwise stated.
- Certified copies of death certificate: 1st copy \$21, additional copies ordered with the original \$4 each.
- If you need more copies later, you pay again \$21 for the 1st copy.
- Cremation prices include crematory charges, container and one signed death certificate.
- Distance charge vary – call for specifics.
- U.S. Coast Guard will spread ashes in the Gulf of Mexico at no charge. Ashes have to be delivered to the Coast Guard station in Galveston. Call 713.671.5100 for information.
- Prices are subject to change. Always call the funeral home for verification.
- **Your Option:** A Memorial Service – for example at your church or community center instead of a funeral home. A Memorial Service is a Celebration of Life, with photos, a slide presentation and a eulogy. Our member Jerestine Leath offers assistance at a reasonable fee. Contact her at 713.631.9111 or by email ojLeath@earthlink.net.

Prepaid Funeral Insurance: Do you need information about Prepaid Funeral Insurance? There is plenty of information on our website www.funeralshouston.org. Go to the Frequently Asked Question (FAQ) section and scroll down to Prepaid Funeral Insurance.

Today's Cremation Options: Fire and Water

As the national trend away from burial in favor of cremation continues to expand, so, too, do the methods by which it is accomplished. A new method being marketed elsewhere as "green cremation" is a highly accelerated version of the natural process found in body decomposition after death. This method involves a mixture of heat, pressure, alkali, and water. The Cremation Association of North America (CANA) reports in 2013 that the cremation rate exceeds 50% in 18 states today. According to the report, some states have a growth rate as big as **3%**. With cremation's lower cost and greater flexibility, more Americans are choosing cremation than ever before. See table below.

'Green Cremation'

Alkaline hydrolysis is an alternative form of disposition that is gaining ground in the United States but no indication online that it is available in Texas. Used by the University of Florida in Gainesville since 1995 and by Mayo Clinic since 2006, alkaline hydrolysis is a hydro-chemical process that uses water, an alkali solution of potassium hydroxide, heat, and pressure to reduce a human body to bone fragments and a sterile liquid.

The body is placed in a stainless steel cylinder with water and potassium hydroxide. The solution is heated to 350° under high pressure. In two to three hours, the body is dissolved into a sterile liquid, or effluent, and bone fragments. The effluent is drained into the local municipal sewage system. Then, similar to cremation, the remaining bone fragments are processed and returned to family. Other terms for alkaline hydrolysis are "green cremation," "bio cremation," "aquamation," "resomation," and "flameless cremation." For those who are concerned about reducing their carbon footprint, alkaline hydrolysis has benefits over flame-based cremation. The process is free of mercury emissions and it consumes eight times less energy than flame-based cremation. Bradshaw Funerals in Minnesota has offered alkaline hydrolysis since 2012. Bradshaw charges the same price for green cremation as flame-based cremation, and found that 80% of its customers have chosen green cremation. It is inevitable that alkaline hydrolysis will become more available in the future as a safer and more environmentally friendly method of disposition.

Source: Marci Michnick, FCA-GKC Vice President

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FUNERAL CONSUMERS ALLIANCE OF HOUSTON

Member of the Federation of Nonprofit Funeral Information Societies

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Thank You for Your Tax-Deductible Contribution

(Contributions can be deductible as charitable donations for tax purposes.)

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