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A Better World

Maximizing life with hospice care

Todd Cohen

The number of patients and families served each year by Transitions LifeCare, formerly Hospice of Wake County, has roughly doubled in the last five years to between 5,000 and 6,000.

According to a recent report in The Huffington Post, the U.S. hospice industry has quadrupled since 2000 and, among all Medicare patients who die, nearly half are hospice patients – twice as many as in 2000.

To cope with rising demand for services, growing competition from for-profit providers, changes in health care regulation and a reluctance among Americans to acknowledge their mortality, Transitions LifeCare is undergoing big changes of its own.

In addition to changing its name, the Raleigh nonprofit has developed partnerships to better educate health professionals and care providers, and raise awareness, about end-of-life care.

It also has launched the quiet phase of a \$6 million capital campaign to add 10 private single rooms to its 20-room hospice home, install a Veterans Garden and create a building maintenance fund for its eight-acre campus.

"We have a unique expertise in managing a period of a patient's life that is emotionally exhausting, medically intense and financially can be extremely expensive," says [Cooper Linton](#), vice president of marketing and business development. That approach is in sync with a marketplace and regulatory climate that he says is increasingly "moving more toward paying for outcomes than paying for process."

Founded in 1979 by volunteers and operating with an annual budget of \$24 million, a staff of 330 people and 450 volunteers, Transitions LifeCare provides home-health care, palliative care, hospice care and grief care.

It also faces increased costs, growing competition, declining insurance reimbursements, rising demand from uninsured patients and "the denial by both our lay society and the

health care profession" that mortality is "the natural last phase of human life," Linton says. "We have an unrealistic and irrational sense that we can eliminate death as a reality."

Transitions LifeCare has worked to improve efficiencies, including a merger four years ago with Hospice of Harnett County, and to increase economies of scale in its operations.

It is working to treat patients sooner through palliative and home-health care and working to find the best way to treat patients collaboratively. It is providing nurse education and classes for lay and professional caregivers. And it has changed its name to reflect its geographic reach and its focus.

"We are more than hospice, serving more than Wake County," Linton says. "There is a misconception and misperception that hospice is about death, as opposed to maximizing life until you die."

Todd Cohen publishes Philanthropy North Carolina at www.philnc.org.