

I had quite a few expectations when it came to my hospice clinical this week. For one, I thought there would be a lot more patients on the floor than there was. I expected the hospice floor to be a full house. When I was up there, there was only 4 patients. After talking to one of the aides, they seem to usually only have 2-5 patients. Which leads into my next expectation. I thought the nurses on the hospice floor would be very busy. I figured they would constantly be changing the patients or giving them medications to help with the pain and keep them comfortable. Since there were only four patients and two nurses, each nurse got two patients. We got our baths done in the morning and gave our medications as needed. This was all done by 10 o'clock, which meant from 10 until 3 the nurses were charting. Unless a call light went off, which wasn't typical, the nurses pretty much just sat and charted. One last expectation I had was that the floor would be very depressing, after all, it is made for people who are actively dying. This couldn't have been farther from the truth. The nurses took such amazing care of the patients and were so compassionate. They treated them as if they were still awake and oriented. They always walked them through what they were doing and talked to them like they were their best friends. It made my heart happy that these patients were so comfortable and in loving hands in their last days. The nurses on the hospice floor truly love their jobs and I think this helps on the bad days they may experience. One thing that really stood out to me was how everyone's experience with the dying process looks different. I work in long term care, so I figured I knew what to expect when it came to hospice; I was truly mistaken with this. Everyone's timeline with death is different and not one dying process is the same. The Hospice Foundation states, "For some people, the dying process may last weeks; for others, it may last a few days or hours. As death approaches, you may notice some of the changes listed below. Because patients start hospice care at different stages of their illness, they may have some or none of these symptoms when they begin hospice care. Patients who are admitted to hospice earlier in their illness may not experience any symptoms for many months." (*Signs of approaching death* 2024). One of our patients that we had was nearing death. She had mottling on her feet, was turning blue, had very irregular respirations, and could no longer swallow. This is what I expected the dying process to look like, but I thought it would be quicker than what it was. I figured when they turned like this that the end would be near, but the nurses said she had been like this for a few days. Our other patient was also nearing death but in a much different way; honestly a way I never would've thought. This patient had been on dialysis for two years, three times a week. She had stopped dialysis about four weeks ago, so the toxins are slowly building up in her body since the kidneys can't pump them out. Because of this, she had what the nurses call "terminal agitation". I truly have never seen anything like it. She could no longer talk, eat, swallow, walk, or do any basic functions, but she could not stop rolling around in her bed. The one time I found her hanging off the side of the bed headfirst. This shows that both patients are dying, but in much different manners. My beliefs when it

comes to the dying process are very limited. I believe that one passes and moves onto the other side. Every time someone has passed in my presence, I open the window for them so their souls can make it to its destination, wherever that may be. After experiencing hospice, my beliefs have somewhat shifted. I learned from observing and listening to the nurses that even if someone's body is ready to go, their minds might not be. A person must truly be at peace in order to pass. If there is any hostility towards another family member or if they are struggling with their religious beliefs, it is harder for them to pass away. The patient with mottling could not seem to give in to their body. I learned from her sister that there is some family hostility that was never resolved, and I truly believe this could be a reason the dying process is going so slow for her. I also believe that it could be going slow because her children have not accepted what is happening. She might not want to leave earthside because her children are finding it hard to let go. The experience on hospice did not really change the way I would treat someone or bother me at all. I have always and will always treat people with love and respect, whether they are 2 years old or 102 years old. After all, we all go into the nursing field to help others. Hospice is still helping others, just in a different way. These people are still human and still need the same love and respect we would give any other patient, if not more. Overall, I am very happy with my experience on hospice. I learned a lot about the dying process and the strength it takes to be a hospice nurse. I learned that every human deserves the same attention from the nurse no matter the circumstance. I truly enjoyed this experience and might look into hospice nursing post NCLEX.

*Signs of approaching death.* Hospice Foundation of America. (2024a).

<https://hospicefoundation.org/Hospice-Care/Signs-of-Approaching-Death>