

LETTERS

A renewed opportunity to make ourselves aware of end-of-life care

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Former president Jimmy Carter at his home in Plains, Ga., in June 2021. ERIN SCHAFF/NYT

The announcement that [former president Jimmy Carter entered hospice care](#) provides important awareness about patients' options as they transition to the end of life. My experience as a hospice medical director indicates that there is a long way to go in raising that awareness.

Every time I witness a patient or family member crumple at the suggestion of hospice or palliative care, I despair over the misconception, even by my fellow health care providers, that either means giving up.

Both medical specialties offer comprehensive, interdisciplinary care that relieves the stress and symptoms associated with complex, serious illness. A key difference is palliative care interventions can be provided along with life-prolonging treatments. Hospice manages physical, psychosocial, and spiritual issues for those who are expected to live six or fewer months who have decided against curative measures.

Both palliative and hospice care respect and honor the patient's wishes. Every journey toward end of life is unique, as is an individual's goal of care, whether it is to remain pain-free, spend another special holiday with loved ones, or resolve difficult family dynamics.

Like so many others, my thoughts are with Carter and his family. So, too, is my heartfelt gratitude for making known these opportunities for improved quality of life that everyone deserves.

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