

Opinion

## LETTER: KEEP HOSPICE CARE CLOSE TO HOME

Thursday, April 7, 2011 1:05 AM EDT

### Keep hospice care close to home

To the editor:

There is an old Irish saying, "An empty sack does not stand." And that is how I view former Deputy Commissioner Norma Gyle's spirited defense of proposed Department of Public Health regulations which seek to reduce and eliminate medical services to the terminally ill in our state.

Two years ago, the administration of Governor Rell, under the direction and guidance of the state health department, set about to review and rewrite Connecticut's regulations for the delivery of inpatient hospice care. Tragically, rather than learning from and relying on 30 years of best practices and clinical experience with thousands of hospice patients, the Department of Public Health chose to lower Connecticut's hospice standards to the "minimum health and safety requirements" established by Medicare. The proposed regulations would reduce medical staffing requirements for terminally-ill patients, eliminate the requirement that physicians and pharmacists be on-site for 24 hour care and reduce the clinical experience needed to qualify hospice directors and department heads.

I have had numerous personal experiences with hospice care in our state as friends, colleagues and loved ones have passed from my life. As hard as this was, my family and I were sustained by dedicated hospice physicians, nurses, social service directors, clergy and volunteers who operate as a team providing comfort and counseling to patients and families at the end of life. You only have to experience this once to realize that Connecticut really has developed the national and international model for high quality hospice care.

It also is comforting to know that no citizen in this state is more than 30 minutes from a hospice facility and that our resources and ability to deliver effective pain and symptom management and support for the terminally ill and their families is readily available and expands every year. All our citizens have the opportunity to receive hospice services close to their homes and families. We can thank the founders of hospice care in our state for their foresight and dedication for launching and educating people on the value of hospice care three decades ago.

Ironically, the same Department of Public Health that bills itself as "a leader in public health policy and advocacy" wants to tear down our existing standards for inpatient hospice care and substitute the minimum standards required by Medicare. If the department continues down this path of devaluing hospice care for our sickest patients, I can only conclude that the department is more like that "empty sack," void of its mission to support and protect the people of Connecticut. I urge the rejection of these proposed hospice regulations before any harm is done to our loved ones at the end of their lives.

*Eileen Daily**Editor's note: Daily is the democratic state Senator for the town of Westbrook.*