

The Reader's Page

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New standards wouldn't advance hospice services

By David J. McQuade

I take strong exception to "For hospice regulation changes" (March 29), Deborah Hoyt's letter in support of regulatory changes to inpatient hospice care proposed by the state Department of Public Health.



First, despite Hoyt's claim, Connecticut has never lagged in providing hospice services, nor have any of its residents been denied access to the highest quality hospice care available in this country.

In fact, our medically rich state has more than 30 organizations providing hospice services to approximately 10,000 patients annually. Each of these organizations is required by Medicare to provide inpatient hospice services for their hospice patients. Much of this inpatient care is provided in the state's acute-care hospitals, which designate hospice beds and teams in their facilities for these patients. More than 90 percent of Connecticut residents live within 30 minutes of a hospice facility.

Second, Hoyt fails to point out that these proposed

regulations would lower Connecticut's hospice standards to the minimum required by Medicare.

The federal government developed hospice standards in 2008 to assure "minimum health and safety requirements which facilities could reasonably expect to comply." They were designed more for consumer-protection purposes rather than the advancement of hospice care.

The cruel fact is, if Connecticut adopts the Medicare standards as our single standard, hospice staffing and medical services to the terminally ill will be dramatically reduced. Since Medicare pays one uniform fee for all inpatient hospice services, lower standards and staffing requirements mean more money in the pocket of health-care providers. Now we get the picture.

With more than 30 years of experience, one would think our Department of Public Health would recognize the intensity of care needed to treat patients and families at the end of life.

Instead of championing hospice care in Connecticut, our state's health-care agency is bowing to the purveyors of Wal-Mart-style hospice care. We should all be ashamed if these new regulations ever become law.

The writer is a resident of Vernon.