

Public Hearing – Onondaga Community College

November 13, 2007

**Presented by Rebecca Elgie on behalf of
Hospicare and Palliative Care Services of Tompkins County**

Good morning. My name is Rebecca Elgie. I am presenting a brief statement on behalf of Hospicare and Palliative Care Services of Tompkins County.

First, I would like to thank Governor Spitzer and the New York State Departments of Health and Insurance for conducting this series of public hearings. We appreciate the opportunity to participate in an effort to ensure that quality, affordable health care is available to all.

The mission of Hospicare and Palliative Care Services is to bring medical expertise and compassionate, respectful care to people and their loved ones at any stage of a life-threatening illness, and provide information and education about advanced illness, dying and bereavement to the entire community. We do not deny services due to a person's inability to pay.

We rely heavily on Medicare to fund operations. Almost 80% of our operating expenses are covered by Medicare, a small percentage is covered by Medicaid and some insurance plans, and the remaining 20% is met through fundraising efforts, grants and memorial donations.

We are puzzled by the anxiety expressed by some legislators over government-sponsored health care. Hospicare's experience with Medicare has been very positive. The program is efficient, has quality controls, mostly makes timely payments, and has clear guidelines for utilization.

However, we have found that there are some people who fall through the cracks in our system: those who are ineligible for Medicare or Medicaid - particularly poor and middle class persons under age 65 who are without private medical insurance. Given the commitment Hospicare has to providing care to all who need it and are appropriate, we experience considerable burdens in providing for their needs. Each year we face the daunting task of raising funds to defray the cost of this care.

This is not a way for a civilized nation to provide for the dying.

The interdisciplinary team approach used by hospices has now been extended to people earlier in their experience of life-threatening illness than the 6-month requirement for hospice eligibility. Studies have demonstrated that this approach is cost-effective, preventing unnecessary hospitalization and needless treatments. We know that case management, psychological services and spiritual care are essential aspects of palliative care; yet the current reimbursement system provides for payment only to the team physician and nurse-practitioner, again requiring programs that wish to provide comprehensive services to raise private funds to cover their costs, turn people away or provide less effective and adequate service.

Hospicare and Palliative Care Services of Tompkins County adds our voice to those in support of a plan using public financing that will provide quality, affordable, comprehensive health care for every New Yorker from birth until the end-of-life. Certainly many of us would agree this is a basic human right.