

Presentation of TRACY BUCHANAN
Chief Executive Officer, CarePartners Hospice

CarePartners Hospice is pleased to appear at this public hearing, together with our colleagues from Four Seasons Hospice, to offer our comments on the proposed State Medical Facilities plan for 2013.

We are grateful for this process that provides the citizens of North Carolina with the opportunity to directly influence the development of the health care system.

We urge the State of North Carolina to grant our petition for a special need adjustment for six hospice inpatient beds for Buncombe County.

Our interest is in providing a range of services to the residents of our service area, including those with a life limiting illness and their families and loved ones.

Our hospice service is a critical part of the system of care that supports families who are experiencing a terminal illness or dealing with grief and bereavement.

We are able to provide hospice services at four levels of care that best meet the needs of our patients and their families. Often these needs change from day to day.

One of the four levels of care is inpatient hospice care. Though less than 10% of our days of care are at this inpatient level, as many as 30% of our hospice patients will need this level of care at some time during their stay with us.

The inpatient level of care is meant to manage pain and symptoms related to a terminal illness that cannot be managed in other settings. The large majority of our patients are in their own homes. But if their symptoms cannot be effectively managed at home, inpatient hospice care is needed and is very effective. Often patients can return home after a brief period of inpatient care. For other patients, the inpatient level is our last opportunity to provide them and their families with the very special kind of caring that is hospice.

Inpatient hospice care may be provided in several settings including skilled nursing facilities and in hospitals. In Buncombe County, we are fortunate to have a special hospice facility for the provision of inpatient care.

CarePartners Hospice has operated a hospice inpatient facility in Asheville in Buncombe County since 1989. In 2005, CarePartners opened the John F. Keever, Jr. Solace Center on its campus in Asheville with 12 hospice residential beds and 15 hospice inpatient beds. The Solace Center has been a crucial resource for our patients and its beds have been well utilized.

The homelike environment of the Solace Center provides comfort to our patients and their families as they experience one of the most significant events in their lives. In addition to providing the inpatient level of care when it is needed, the availability of the beds at the Solace Center has helped avoid costly and unnecessary hospitalization.

We saw that the demand for our inpatient beds would soon exceed their capacity, so we petitioned for a special needs adjustment to the State Medical Facilities Plan. In early 2011, the State approved converting five of the residential beds to five inpatient beds, and today the facility operates with a total complement of twenty inpatient hospice beds and seven hospice residential beds.

Now in 2012, we are again experiencing high bed occupancies. Year-to-date we are already at an 89% occupancy for rate all of our 20 inpatient beds. Higher occupancies will jeopardize our ability to provide this service when it is needed.

Again, we petition the State of North Carolina to permit consideration of applications for the development of additional hospice inpatient beds in Buncombe County.

Our county is growing rapidly and aging. The hospice service that we and Four Seasons Hospice provide is accepted as the best possible support for patients and families who are facing a life-limiting illness. Please grant our petition to ensure we can continue to provide this service at the highest level of quality and accessibility.