

# Viewpoint

By Daniel M. Isard

## An Open Letter to National Hospice Care

### TOPIC

**For almost three decades, funeral homes have coexisted with hospice, and to many, it's been a symbiotic coexistence. Both are experts in dealing with the dying and survivors of the deceased. Hospice, in general, has been a great aid to our society in recognizing that death is as much part of the life cycle as is birth.**

Dear Hospice,

It is 4:26 a.m., and I am thinking about a phone call I had with a client. The call was identical to many other calls I have had with many other clients over the years. Hospice, you were the topic of the discussion. I hope your ears were burning.

My client called to ask how to handle the referrals from Hospice. He claims that when families ask you about funeral homes, you steer them to only the cheap funeral homes that offer direct disposal. After hearing this, I feel compelled to write this letter to you. I hope my words wake you up.

For almost three decades, funeral homes have coexisted with Hospice, and to many, it's been a symbiotic coexistence. Both are experts in dealing with the dying and survivors of the deceased. Hospice, in general, you have been a great aid to our society in recognizing that death is as much part of the life cycle as is birth.

I have read the position papers of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, which clearly demonstrate your philosophy of service. You, your volunteers and paid employees have done a great job distributing these papers. Through your multitude of

caregivers, you've done well guiding the dying and their families through a difficult time. Hospice, you have a great deal to offer society. But you are missing the importance of the funeral big time.

Your Hospice Philosophy Statement, published in 2000 as part of your Standards of Practices, states that you "support persons in their last phases of an incurable disease." I believe you do this as well as anyone. Your philosophy goes on to state, "Physical, social, spiritual and emotional care is provided by a clinically-directed interdisciplinary team consisting of patients and their families, professionals and volunteers during the last stages of illness; the dying process; and the bereavement period."

Hospice, I believe you are doing a good job helping people through illness and dying, but you are failing to help

families during the bereavement period. I don't think you intend to fail in this area. I just believe that you are not equipped to understand the bereavement period. After expending so much energy helping people and their families through the last stages of life, you get tired. In this final event, which is the first event for the survivors without their loved one, you stop caring. Shame on you!

I speak to funeral directors throughout North America, and I continue to hear that after a death, Hospice continues to influence families in how they choose to remember and honor their loved ones. I often hear that you help families choose the funeral home. I commend you for offering your recommendation, but I don't think you look closely at the quality or expertise of providers. You focus on price and disposition, and



Hospice, remember what a funeral is. It is the coming together of people sensing a loss. They are there to mourn and support each other.

many times, you tell families that a cheap, direct cremation is all they need. To these ends, you are giving very limited counsel.

I'm a business consultant and not a sociologist or psychologist, but I feel compelled to challenge you. I don't like the counsel you are giving, and I want to go on record challenging your advice.

In my opinion, a funeral is about

more than a human disposition. I have heard many funeral directors say, "A funeral is where we get the dead where they should be and the living where they need to be." Where your palliative care is for the dying as well as the survivors, a funeral is essentially only for the survivors. Any funeral director will get the dead where they need to be. However, the survivors need a special level of care the moment that death

occurs. Telling someone to omit the funeral service violates your pledge to provide continued palliative care. Remember, palliative care is the care given to dying patients and their families. Caring for a family doesn't end when the patient dies!

Hospice, remember what a funeral is. It is the coming together of people that are sensing a loss. They are there to mourn and support each other. Hospice, have you ever actually attended a funeral? Have you seen the hugging that takes place throughout the visitation and the service at the graveside? Have you seen the raw emotion? Hospice, a funeral doesn't bring someone back to life, but it does allow their loved ones to share happy memories. Bodies die, but memories live as long as we tell the story.

Hospice, I believe that there are four classes of survivors that comprise the Community of Mourners. In my opinion, these classes are:

1. Immediate family
2. Extended family
3. Unrelated family
4. The supporters of the above


I am sure we can agree upon a definition for immediate family. These are the people that you are normally trying to get to accept that their loved one is dying.

The extended family is related to the patient by birth and marriage. They may not have as much contact with your patient, but they have memories.

The unrelated family is a very large group that I think comprises friends that are as close as family, as well as neighbors, co-workers and other community members, including those who prayed together.

The last group, supporters of the above, is maybe the largest group. These are the spouses, parents and children of the supporters who attend a funeral to accompany the unrelated family. This group may never have known the deceased, but they are there to help the unrelated family be part of this Community of Mourners.

Hospice, when you tell a family that a direct disposition by burial or cremation is all they need, you are giving them counsel that fails to

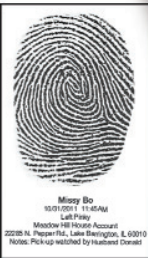


# THUMBIES®

FINGERPRINT KEEPSAKES



*Print image from Scanner*






## Improving with Technology


The Thumbsies Fingerprint Scanner™ The Print Vault™ and Electronic Ordering System (e•OS)™ offer advantages that no other company can.


- **Extraordinary Prints**
- **Print Identification**
- **Unrivaled Print Storage**
- **Secure, Fast and Accurate Ordering**

*Proven Success is the bottom line...*





Add Thumbsies to your Keepsake Center call: **877.848.6243** to receive your **free** Marketing Kit

Visit MHC at Booth 410 at ICCFA for your personal demonstration

recognize three of these groups. In my opinion, you are pandering to the family, thinking the funeral is a burden upon them. In fact, the funeral is intended to take the burden from the shoulders of the family. A funeral is a communal lifting of the fear and burdens of the few to the shoulders of many.

Yes, you are saving the family some money with this advice, but you may

be costing them more money in the future, since they didn't get a chance to share their grief with their extended social network. The family didn't get to celebrate the life of the deceased and see that celebration from the viewpoint of so many others. You promoted the loneliness of the survivor and not the humanity of the Community of Mourners.

Hospice, you promote the value of

life every day. So what is the value of a human death? Is it the least involved form of disposition? I do not think you help your mission statement as you compute the value of death by putting a price on a funeral!

You place a great deal of emphasis on the education of your caregivers. You are selective. You give them the best tools for the ministry they are providing to the terminally ill. Yet, when recommending a funeral home, your local people are often recommending a funeral provider based solely upon the lowest price. Do you assume that one funeral home is the same as another? Do you assume that all cremation providers are equal, regardless of whether they own or subcontract their cremation services? Do you know what the different funeral educational designations mean and what the standards are for those caregivers? When a family needs psychological care, do you refer them to the least experienced therapeutic professionals because they are the cheapest providers? Hospice, can we enter a new generation of respect for those who provide for the disposition of the patient while providing a special nonsectarian ministry to the survivors?

In promoting "treatment that enhances comfort and improves the quality of an individual's life during the last phase of life," as you state in your philosophy, you need to recognize that in planning for the disposition of the body you have new patients – the survivors.

These survivors have different goals and needs than the deceased. Most of these survivors will live a long time, and there are no drugs that will ease their pain. However, just as you encourage family and friends to bid a terminally ill patient goodbye, you should be encouraging your new patients to have their friends and family come together to bid the survivors a renewed hello. That is one aspect of what a funeral provides.

As survivors suffer from the effects of losing a loved one, there are curative efforts that can benefit them. Let us add them to your prescription pad. Whether you call it a "funeral"



**You only have one chance...**

**to make a good first impression**

**Director OnCall**

When they pick up the phone to place their call, the initial contact with your Funeral Home is vital!

**1-800-975-7716**  
[www.DirectorOnCall.com](http://www.DirectorOnCall.com)

We invite you to discover how Director On Call has become the ultimate provider of Funeral Home Answering Services throughout North America !

1 Month free trial, experience the difference.  
**Transparent, Award Winning Service**

or “convocation” is immaterial, but we know that when a family senses their extensive network is there for them, it helps them go on. It may be the first step in the curative care for the survivors, either individually or collectively. What price would you allocate to that, Hospice?

Hospice, are you aware that several of your members wanted to start their own funeral home in Florida? I don’t want to do my Lloyd Bentsen imitation, but “Hospice, I know funeral service, and you are no funeral director.” Don’t get me wrong: I think you would get many calls due to your relationship with the family. However, in my opinion, you don’t understand the purpose of funeral service.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates my point: There was one funeral director who told me about a tour he was giving to a group of elementary school children through his funeral building. He asked them,

“Who among you would want to come into this building in the middle of the night, with the lights off and by yourself?” Not a single child raised a hand.

He then asked them, “Would you come into this building in the middle of the night with all of your classmates and your teachers?” Now the students looked at each other and all raised their hands in agreement. He went on to say, “Children, that is just what a funeral is all about. We attend funerals so that the others won’t be in this building lonely and afraid.”

Hospice is about positive care, and so is a funeral. Just as you once stood up to tell society that it needed to focus on palliative care for their loved ones, you should be one of the first to stand up and say that the care for the survivors must begin with a community coming together at the time of death. Rather than disrespecting the funeral, you should go the next step and ratify it.

Hospice, I am not writing this letter to make you an enemy. I am hoping to make a friend. Sometimes the most valuable person is the one who tells the secret that all have been biting their tongues to suppress. Think how much good you could do if you looked at the results that could come from supportive relationships with local funeral homes.

Hospice, it is now 5:49 a.m. My alarm is about to tell me the remainder of my night’s sleep has been lost to you. I hope you read this letter. I hope that it causes you to lose some sleep in wondering how to deal with it. Most of all, I hope that if I or a loved one ever needs your care, you will be there for us. Just don’t try to tell us to pick a funeral home based on price. We know better because we see the value of funeral service every day.

Cordially,  
Daniel M. Isard



*Affinity Caskets*

- \* High Quality Velvet Interiors with Custom Piping Trim
- \* Service Branch Chrome Emblem on Lid Exterior
- \* Service Branch Emblem On Head Panel
- \* US Flag Emblem at Both Ends
- \* Stars on Front and Back

Police and Firefighter Caskets Available

HONORING THOSE WHO SERVED™



1-800-882-5907 • www.affinitycaskets.com  
Free Ground Shipping

## Funeral Exclusive Answering Service



### ASD is the Needle in the Haystack



1,000 answering services to choose from but **only ASD** has the solutions your funeral business has been seeking.

**ASD**  
1-800-868-9950  
www.myASD.com