

# FIVE QUESTIONS

**Samira Beckwith**

Interview by Marla J. Ottenstein

**H**OSPITALIZED WITH HODGKIN'S DISEASE IN 1976, Samira Beckwith witnessed first-hand the failings of a medical system that cared more about the disease than about the patients' care and comfort.

As president and CEO of Hope Hospice of Southwest Florida, Beckwith has realized her life's passion to ensure that people have a choice as to how they face death. She has been a major force in increasing both community and national awareness for hospice and palliative care and has made a difference in setting the standards of excellence in hospice legislation.

Hospice emphasizes comfort and counseling in an effort to provide the highest levels of social, spiritual and physical support for the patient and patient's family. Hospice educates people and gives them the tools to approach death with dignity and compassion. Beckwith's mission is to provide care that celebrates the end of life.



COURTESY OF SAMIRA BECKWITH

**1 What exactly is hospice and palliative care, and why choose hospice?**

We care for people during the final chapter of their lives. Our goals are to provide relief from pain and symptoms, while also providing care for the patient's family when it is needed the most. We wonder why people would not choose hospice.

**2 What other services does Hope Hospice offer?**

At Hope Hospice, we embrace each person as an individual, not as a patient that must fit into medical protocols and procedures. Because of this, our services include special programs such as art, music, massage, aromatherapy and pet therapy, often enabling the person to find comfort and closure at this most difficult time. While we cannot add days to their lives, we can add quality to each day.

**3 How has public policy been affected by hospice?**

The health-care system has learned to

respect the individual's needs, which has led to improvements in the system. Our lessons learned are lessons shared. Through my leadership positions with state and national organizations, including my appointment to Gov. Bush's Long-term Care Advisory Council, we have focused on public policy, education, diversity and better access to care.

**4 Based on the apparent direction of health-care services and funding, what do you see as your biggest challenge?**

A major challenge in hospice care lies in changing the way our culture thinks, so that families can cherish the end of life just as they celebrate its beginning. Medicare, Medicaid and insurance benefits are important sources of funding, yet we must turn to the community to fill in the gaps. Raising public awareness is always a priority.

**5 What are the future plans for growth and funding for Hope Hospice of Southwest Florida?**

Our new facility in Bonita Springs is now under construction. Joanne's House is supported by our aggressive pursuit of contributions from the community. New programs under development will serve as models for new ways of caring for our community.