

RELIGION

Hospice-care agency earns certification from Jewish organization

Certification by National Institute of Jewish Hospice granted to only 1 percent of hospices

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PROVIDENCE — The state's largest hospice-care agency has become one of only 55 nationwide certified by the National Institute of Jewish Hospice to provide end-of-life care for people of the Jewish faith.

Diana Franchitto, president and CEO of Home and Hospice Care of Rhode Island, said Monday that the agency took the step of seeking the certification, granted to only 1 percent of hospices, because "we see it as very important to understand the needs of our Jewish patients and their families."

In a keynote speech Tues-

day in Warwick, Rabbi Joel Seltzer, of Providence's Temple Emanu-El and a hospice board member, will brief the agency's 365 paid and 325 volunteer staff on some of the Jewish teachings and rituals, including the practice of sitting at home for seven days after the death of a loved one while the family receives visits from friends and acquaintances.

Jewish law teaches that "anyone who is actively dying needs to be treated as though they are actively living in every last way," the rabbi said.

He noted that since medieval times, rabbis have taught that one can never hasten a patient's death, but it is permissible to remove an "impediment" that is keeping someone alive artificially.

One fierce debate in Jewish circles, he said, is whether providing nutrition and hy-

dration to a patient is an "impediment" that can be stopped, or whether denying them constitutes a hastening of someone's death.

Rabbi Seltzer said there is more agreement about removing a patient from a respirator if the person so chooses, but that questions remain about "do not resuscitate" orders, especially if the person is relatively young.

He said it is important that staff be sensitive to religious traditions and ask if there is a rabbi with whom the patient has a relationship who can be called to provide comfort and counsel.

Even "secular" Jews should be asked, he said, since even people who have not been observant may draw comfort in the spiritual traditions.

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