



Annual Hospice and Palliative Care Association of Iowa Conference

Preconference Dec. 1 | Conference Dec. 2



Hospice & Palliative Care
ASSOCIATION OF IOWA

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

The Hospice and Palliative Care Association of Iowa Conference features a variety of clinical, regulatory and leadership topics presented by national consultants and industry authorities.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This conference is for hospice and palliative care professionals, including:

- Administrators
- Bereavement coordinators
- Chaplains, Clinicians
- Executive directors
- Interdisciplinary teams
- Nurses
- Physician program directors
- Social workers
- Volunteers

PRECONFERENCE | MONDAY, DEC. 1 | IHA CONFERENCE CENTER

Angie Meyer, MSN, RN, CHPN, Home Health and Hospice Manager, Gundersen Palmer Hospital and Clinics, West Union

9 a.m. End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium

The End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium is a national and international education initiative to improve palliative care. Since 2000, the consortium has been a collaboration between City of Hope and the American Association of Critical-Care Nurses. Administered by City of Hope, the consortium provides training in palliative care to:

- Continuing education providers
- Specialty nurses in pediatrics, oncology, critical care and geriatrics
- Staff development educators
- Undergraduate and graduate nursing faculty

These professionals can then teach this essential information to nursing students, practicing nurses and other health care providers. Course content is divided into modules, which include:

- Communication
- Cultural and spiritual
- Ethical issues
- Final hours
- Loss, grief and bereavement
- Pain management
- Palliative nursing
- Symptom management

Learning objectives:

- Applying evidencebased practices in palliative care, including pain management and holistic care
- Enhancing communication skills with patients and families and integrating these skills into clinical practice
- Preparing students for effective palliative care by integrating advanced communication skills and critical thinking components of pain assessment
- Understanding the philosophy and principles of palliative care and identifying appropriate populations for care

Noon Lunch

12:30 p.m. End-of-Life Nursing Education Consortium continued

3:30 p.m. Adjourn

4:30-6:30 P.M. VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION AND HOSPICE AWARDS CEREMONY

IHA Conference Center, 100 E. Grand Ave., Ste. 100, Des Moines

CONFERENCE AGENDA | TUESDAY, DEC. 2 | IHA CONFERENCE CENTER

8:30 a.m. Registration and Breakfast

9 a.m. Welcome and HPCAI Business Meeting

9:15 a.m. **15 Things Veterans Want You to Know**

Angie Meyer, MSN, RN, CHPN, Home Health and Hospice Manager, Gundersen Palmer Hospital and Clinics, West Union

This is the cornerstone course for PsychArmor and was created to educate anyone who works with, lives with or cares for veterans. PsychArmor asked hundreds of veterans what they wanted civilians, employers, educators, health care providers and therapists to know about them. These comments were used to create the topics of this course. Because fewer than 7% of Americans serve or have served in uniform, most civilians are unfamiliar with military culture. As a result, members of the military and veteran communities often feel misunderstood and reluctant to seek support.

Learning objectives:

- Discover 15 facts that promote greater understanding of veterans
- Educate anyone who works with, lives with or cares for military veterans
- Learn five questions you should always ask veterans
- Learn the one question you should never ask veterans

9:45 a.m. Break

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

10 a.m. **The Changing Landscape of Substitute Decision-making**

Cynthia Letsch, JD, CMP, Managing Attorney, Letsch Law Firm, Grimes

Understand the evolving models of substitute decision-making, including psychiatric advance directives and supported decision-making. Explore the legal and ethical debate between “best interest” and “substituted judgment” approaches, and how these models relate to Iowa’s guardianship laws.

Learning objectives:

- Analyze the evolving models of substitute decision-making
- Discuss how these models relate to Iowa’s guardianship laws
- Explore the legal and ethical debate between “best interest” and “substituted judgment”

10 a.m. **Making the Most of Veterans Administration Benefits**

Michael Mortensen, Deputy Director, Polk County Veteran Affairs, Des Moines

Learn how to identify veterans and understand their unique needs. Explore eligibility requirements for Veterans Administration health care, compensation and pension, and gain insight into the range of county, state and federal benefits available to veterans and their families.

Learning objectives:

- Explore eligibility requirements for Veterans Administration health care, compensation and pension
- Gain insight into the range of county, state and federal benefits available to veterans and their families
- Learn how to identify veterans and understand their unique needs

11 a.m. Break

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

11:15 a.m. HOPE – Are You Getting Credit?

Annette Lee, RN, Founder, Provider Insights, Des Moines

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services continues to validate hospice agency responses in the HOPE tool, affecting publicly reported and new quality measures. This session equips participants with the knowledge and resources to ensure accurate reporting, maintain positive outcomes and demonstrate the high-quality care being delivered. A bonus tool provides measurement specifications and a step-by-step guide to using the Quality Improvement and Evaluation Service's "review and correct" reports for data validation.

Learning objectives:

- Analyze how HOPE item responses affect CMS quality measure calculations and publicly reported data
- Implement strategies and tools – such as measure specification references and QIES "review and correct" reports – to verify accuracy and optimize performance in HOPE-based quality reporting

11:15 a.m. Hey, Mr. Funeral Director!

Blair Overton, Licensed Funeral Director, Iowa Funeral Planning, Des Moines

An overview of end-of-life issues affecting families and their decision-making. The course will highlight pitfalls to avoid and provide helpful information for families to prepare for final disposition and possible ceremonies for the deceased. An overview of legal issues regarding next of kin and designee for final disposition. The session will end with time for questions and answers.

Learning objectives:

- Discuss legal issues regarding next of kin and the designee for final disposition
- Highlight pitfalls to avoid and information that will help families
- Review end-of-life issues affecting families and their decision-making

12:15 p.m. Lunch

BREAKOUT SESSIONS

1 p.m. Audits: What to Expect and How to Prepare and Succeed

Annette Lee, RN, Founder, Provider Insights, Des Moines

CMS and other entities have intensified their review of hospice documentation and billing practices. Even compliant hospices can be caught in the expanding scope of medical reviews. This session provides participants with practical insights, tools and checklists to prepare for audits, respond to medical review requests and ensure successful outcomes regardless of the auditor.

Learning objectives:

- Describe the CMS hospice audit environment, including audit types, focus areas and typical findings in medical reviews
- Develop and apply an agency-specific audit readiness plan incorporating documentation best practices, response checklists, and internal review processes to ensure compliance and audit success

1 p.m. Ensuring Goal-concordant Pharmacotherapy in Palliative and Hospice Care

James Ray, PharmD, FPPCP, Associate Professor Emeritus, The University of Iowa College of Pharmacy, Iowa City

This session will discuss constructing evidence-based and goal-concordant pharmacotherapy for patients with serious illnesses. Case studies incorporating audience participation will be used.

Learning objectives:

- Employ evolving evidence for the rational use of medicines in pain and symptom management
- Identify how to manage drug-related problems in patients with serious illness
- Identify no-value or low-value medicines in daily goal-concordant care of patients with serious illnesses

2 p.m. Break

2:15 p.m.

Navigating Critical Situations in Hospice Care: When to Involve External Authorities

Gloriana Fisher, Preventive and Protective Services Bureau Director, Iowa Department of Health and Human Services, Des Moines; Nancy Ruzicka, B.S., RPh, MBA, MJ, CHC, Owner, Ruzicka Healthcare Consulting, Altoona

This panel discussion will explore the complex and sensitive decisions hospice care providers face when encountering situations that may require external intervention. Panelists will address real-world scenarios involving suspected dependent adult abuse, the presence of weapons in the home, suicidal ideation and violations of the Medicare conditions of participation. Through interdisciplinary dialogue, the session will guide participants in recognizing red flags, understanding legal and ethical responsibilities, and determining when and how to involve outside agencies such as Adult Protective Services, law enforcement or mental health crisis teams. The panel will also emphasize the importance of maintaining patient dignity, family trust and regulatory compliance while ensuring safety for all involved. Participants will gain practical insights, tools and frameworks to support decision-making in high-risk situations, leaving them better equipped to navigate the intersection of hospice care, safety and legal accountability.

Learning objectives:

- Apply case-based learning
- Assess situational risk and safety
- Determine appropriate external engagement
- Promote interdisciplinary collaboration
- Recognize indicators of risk and abuse
- Understand legal and ethical obligations

3:15 p.m.

Walking the Talk: Radical Self-Care for the Compassionate Professional

Heather Stang, M.A., C-IAYT, Author and Founder, Frederick Meditation Center and the Mindfulness and Grief Institute, Frederick, Maryland

Hospice and palliative care require deep compassion, presence and strength. But the same qualities that help you support others can leave you vulnerable to feeling overwhelmed, especially if you're not tending to your well-being. This keynote offers you time and space to come back to yourself. Through simple guided practices and gentle reflection, you'll explore what it means to show up for yourself with the same care you offer to others. We'll begin by regulating the nervous system and connecting to the body and breath, tools you can use anytime you feel off balance or drained. You'll be invited to try resourcing practices from the Mindfulness and Grief System and reflect on how self-care can become less of a to-do list and more of a lived value. You'll leave with practical strategies to reduce burnout and compassion fatigue, and a deeper understanding of why your well-being is not a luxury, it's a necessity.

Learning objectives:

- Describe the impact of chronic stress and compassion fatigue on professionals working in hospice and palliative care
- Identify at least two nervous system regulation strategies that can be used in real time to reduce feelings of overwhelm
- Reflect on personal barriers to self-care and begin to reframe self-support as essential rather than optional

4:15 p.m.

Closing comments

SPEAKERS

Gloriana Fisher is the chief of the Preventive and Protective Services Bureau at the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services. Fisher has worked in various roles at the Iowa Department of Health and Human Services for over 18 years. She received her Bachelor of Arts in Social Work from the University of Northern Iowa and her public manager certification from Drake University.

Annette Lee is a registered nurse with a master's degree in health care administration. Lee has been practicing since 1990. For more than a decade, she worked with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services as a home health and hospice intermediary, providing reviews and education about home health and hospice documentation. Lee worked as a specialist in the medical review, appeals and provider education departments. She founded Provider Insights to offer support and education about Medicare reimbursement issues and effective documentation strategies. Lee also helps providers with survey preparation and appeals.

Cynthia Letsch obtained her undergraduate degree at Southern Methodist University and her Doctor of Jurisprudence from Drake University in 1995, graduating with honors from both universities. Letsch's legal career includes private practice, eight years of teaching at the university level and serving as corporate counsel. She became a certified Medicaid planner in 2024. Letsch's office opened in 2013. The practice is limited to elder law, estate planning, special needs planning and probate/trust administration. She is a frequent speaker about estate planning and asset preservation, Medicaid for the elderly, Medicaid financial risk management for care facilities, and the fiduciary responsibilities of agents under powers of attorney, guardians, conservators and trustees. Letsch is a member of the probate, trust and elder law sections of the Iowa, Missouri and Nebraska bar

associations. She is also a member of the National Academy of Elder Law Attorneys, Society of Financial Service Professionals and an accredited Veterans Administration attorney.

Angie Meyer is the clinical manager of Home Health and Hospice at Gundersen Palmer Lutheran Hospitals and Clinics. Meyer received her Master of Science in Nursing Leadership and Management from Western Governors University in 2021. She's lived with a mental health illness for over 15 years, but it has not stopped her from achieving her life goals. Meyer has experienced firsthand how mental health affects culture and productivity in the workplace. As a young leader, she's inspired to change the perception of mental health in the workplace and help break down the associated stigma.

Michael Mortensen is the deputy director of Veteran Affairs for Polk County and a retired U.S. Army noncommissioned officer. Mortensen's military service took him to 23 different countries, serving two combat tours in Iraq and overseeing military detainee and combatant operations in both Iraq and Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. He's been a county veteran service officer since 2014 and was president of the Iowa Association of County Commissioners and Veteran Service Officers from 2018 to 2023.

Blair Overton has been a licensed funeral director since 1992. Overton earned a degree in economics from the University of Iowa in 1990. He received his education in mortuary sciences in 1991 at the New England Institute, where he received the Fredrick J. Walker Award for the highest academic average and the Founders Award for the most-promising contributor to funeral service. Overton worked for the J.S. Waterman and Sons Funeral Home in Boston before returning to Iowa and joining his family's business as the fourth generation representing Overton Funeral Homes. He and two partners bought the family funeral homes and expanded operations to Des Moines in 2008. Overton has owned and operated funeral homes, a cremation society and two cemeteries in Iowa for 30 years.

James Ray, PharmD, is an associate professor emeritus in the Division of Applied Clinical Sciences in the Department of Pharmacy Practice and Science and a clinical associate professor at the University of Iowa Carver College of Medicine, Department of Internal Medicine. Until his retirement in June, Dr. Ray had held the University of Iowa College of Pharmacy Otterbeck OnePoint Patient Care Professorship in Hospice and Palliative Care since 2015. During that time, he created a university-approved palliative care certificate for pharmacy doctoral students. He also developed an American Society of Health System Pharmacists-accredited post-graduate year two palliative care and pain management pharmacy residency. In addition, Dr. Ray helped form the SOLACE Palliative Care Collaborative at the college. He previously was the University of Iowa Health Care clinical pharmacy specialist for the Inpatient Adult Supportive and Palliative Care Service and a faculty member of the Hospice and Palliative Medicine Fellowship. Dr. Ray is a founding member, a past president, former trustee and fellow of the Society of Pain and Palliative Care Pharmacists.

Nancy Ruzicka is a consultant on state and federal rules, regulations and interpretative guidelines. Ruzicka previously worked as director of integrity and compliance and privacy official at MercyOne Des Moines and director of regulatory compliance at UnityPoint Health-Des Moines. She also has over 20 years of experience with the Iowa Department of Inspections and Appeals. Ruzicka holds master's degrees in health law and business administration and a bachelor's degree in pharmacy, all from Drake University. She is certified in health care compliance and maintains her Iowa pharmacy license.

Heather Stang is a thanatologist who focuses on teaching others to use mindfulness-based techniques to reduce stress, cope with grief and cultivate personal growth. Stang is inspired by her own journey of love, loss and post-traumatic growth. A former crisis hotline call specialist for the Frederick County Mental Health Association, she provided information, referrals and supportive listening for callers of Maryland 211, the Frederick County Hotline and more. Stang relied on her mindfulness training to maintain a calm and compassionate attitude both on the job and at home after difficult shifts. Additionally, she volunteered as a trainer and call specialist on the New Orleans hotline just weeks after Hurricane Katrina devastated the region and was a research assistant for the National Institute of Mental Health-funded National Suicide Prevention Lifeline Research Project. Stang earned a master's degree in Thanatology from Hood College in 2010 and founded the Frederick Meditation Center, where she is a yoga therapist and mindfulness meditation instructor. Besides writing the book "Mindfulness and Grief" in 2014, she has contributed to "Techniques of Grief Therapy" (2015).

REGISTRATION

Register online at www.hpcal.org.

- HPCAI member preconference \$79
- Nonmember preconference \$99
- HPCAI member conference – \$175
- Nonmember conference – \$225
- HPCAI member two-day bundle - \$200 (\$54 savings)
- Volunteer – \$79 (email mcgilla@ihaonline.org for discount code)
- Student – \$79 (email mcgilla@ihaonline.org for discount code)

CONTINUING EDUCATION

HPCAI will provide a certificate of attendance after completing the program evaluation and strongly encourages nurses to retain a program brochure as documentation of their participation. Nurses determine whether course content meets the Iowa Board of Nursing's criteria for appropriate continuing education.

For Iowa-licensed social workers, therapists and other health care professionals, it is the licensee's discretion to choose relevant sessions and self-report. HPCAI will provide generic certificates of attendance.

PROGRAM LOCATION

IHA Conference Center, 100 E. Grand Ave., Ste. 100, Des Moines

- Dress for the conference is business casual. Layered clothing is recommended for your comfort.
- If you have dietary restrictions or allergies, email iharegistration@ihaonline.org.
- This is a paperless conference. HPCAI will email conference materials when available.

LODGING

HPCAI offers a discounted corporate rate for attendees to use for overnight accommodation. HPCAI provides a discounted rate to attendees on "non-last room" availability, meaning that this rate may not always be available because of high demand.

Book early if you think you may need arrangements. When calling, reference the corporate ID:

[Staybridge Suites Des Moines](#)

Corporate rate: \$139/night plus taxes
515-280-3828

Corporate ID No.: IXNR

[Downtown Des Moines AC Marriott](#)

Corporate rate: \$177/night plus taxes
515-518-6060

Corporate ID Code: 3QR

REGISTRATION/CANCELLATION/REFUND POLICY

- Cancellations and substitutions are welcome anytime. Email cancellations and substitution requests to iharegistration@ihaonline.org.
- HPCAI will refund cancellations received 10 or more business days before the conference.
- HPCAI will charge a \$50 administrative fee for cancellations received six to nine business days before the conference.
- HPCAI will not refund cancellations received five or fewer business days before the conference.
- HPCAI will calculate refunds by the date received and the HPCAI business days remaining before the conference.
- HPCAI may cancel the conference because of low enrollment. If so, HPCAI will notify preregistered participants and provide full refunds.

ADA POLICY

IHA does not discriminate in its educational programs based on race, religion, color, sex or disability. IHA wishes to ensure no one with a disability is excluded, denied services, segregated or treated differently than others because of the absence of auxiliary aids and services. If you need auxiliary aids or services identified in the Americans With Disabilities Act to attend this conference, contact the IHA Education Department at 515-288-1955.