



## Quality is Everything

For over 41 years, Yolo Hospice has led the effort to create the gold standard for exemplary care.

A diagnosis of a terminal illness can be a shattering experience. In that moment, everything changes, and most people feel extremely vulnerable. Facing their own mortality, along with the many crucial decisions and changes that come with diagnosis, can be overwhelming and isolating.

“Our role at Yolo Hospice is to be both an expert guide and compassionate support through what can be a frightening time,” says Craig Dresang, CEO of Yolo Hospice. “With the help of our dedicated staff and volunteers, we offer patient-centered, comprehensive care that transforms and brings grace, comfort, and meaning to the experience.”

Nestled in California’s Sacramento Valley, Yolo Hospice, the region’s first established hospice, stands as a preeminent provider of compassionate, dignified

end-of-life care. Begun by grassroots healthcare and community volunteers on a mission to transform end-of-life care in its five-county Sacramento Valley service area, the organization carries this same passion after more than 41 years of service. With key quality indicators that consistently exceed state and national averages, and a history of benchmark-setting care, the hospice routinely garners the praise of referring physicians and families.

As a nonprofit organization, Yolo Hospice, along with its palliative care program YoloCares and its caregiver-

oriented initiative Citizens Who Care, focuses its attention on the needs and goals of the patients and their families above all else. “That starts by listening,” says Dresang. “You have to ask good questions and be in tune with what the patient and family are saying so you can align the care with what’s most important to them.”

### A Love for Learning

Yolo Hospice approaches its employee relationships with the same care and respect. Recognizing that high-quality patient care begins with retaining first-rate employees, the hospice is selective in onboarding the most qualified, passionate people, earning it recognition as one of Modern Healthcare’s Best Places to Work in 2020.

“Whether a receptionist, physician, chaplain, or janitor, we want people who carry a vision for their work and a heart for people,” says Dresang. “Once they’re

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Craig Dresang, CEO, Yolo Hospice

here, our job is to create an environment of lifelong learning. We’re constantly evolving and striving to become better.”

This lifelong learning approach encourages close collaboration between the patient, their family, and their hospice team. Each hospice team consists of a registered nurse, personal nursing aid, professionally trained volunteer, hospice and palliative care physician, chaplain, and social worker who meet weekly to discuss the patient’s evolving care goals and needs. The hospice team members also educate and involve the patient and family in the plan of care.

“Every day,” Dresang says, “we teach our patients and families how to foster grace, compassion, and good care with each other, their loved ones, and themselves.”

### Communication Fosters Quality

Interwoven with the collaborative learning approach is an emphasis on quality communication. “Good care is directly linked to good communication,” says Dresang. “We focus a lot on what being good communicators looks like from a care perspective.”

The hospice encourages all staff members, at the end of every patient interaction, to ask what more they can do. Dresang recalls the time a chaplain posed this question to a patient during the patient’s final weeks of life. “The patient said, ‘Yes, you can marry us,’ pointing to his partner of 34 years,” Dresang says. “The chaplain got to work, filing the correct paperwork, organizing for a cake to be donated, and finding the patient’s estranged son to coordinate a reunion.” The small wedding ceremony took place in the patient’s home within days of the request.

“It wasn’t medication in the traditional sense, but it brought healing and closure for this patient,” Dresang says. “And that’s part of quality care, too.”

Communication also involves speaking out for changes in end-of-life care. As the Sacramento region’s only hospice



The Citizens Who Care division of Yolo Hospice supports caregivers who find themselves overwhelmed when caring for their loved one. No one else offers such comprehensive caregiver support. Additionally, Yolo Hospice is a leader in advance care planning education, offering the area’s first advance care planning courses to over 3,000 community members and bringing peace and clarity to a stressful topic.

Top-tier bereavement programs are the final pillar in Yolo Hospice’s services. Notably, the children’s bereavement program is the only program in the hospice’s service area helping children, whether connected to patients of the hospice or not, deal with the loss of family, friends, or classmates. These free programs illustrate Yolo Hospice’s commitment to the community it calls home.

“Perhaps the biggest crisis any of us will face is dealing with our own death—how it’ll impact our family, friends, and legacy,” says Yolo Hospice CEO Craig Dresang. “Our work is transformational, even at the end of somebody’s journey. It’s life-changing and life-affirming for the patients, their families, and our staff.”

Dresang says. “It’s always alive. Our goal is to keep that hope alive and fuel it to provide patients and families with what’s most important to them.”



Craig Dresang, CEO  
Yolo Hospice

invited to be a member of the prestigious National Partnership for Hospice Innovation, Yolo Hospice advocates for improvements in end-of-life care.

In the 1970s, Yolo Hospice’s then executive director teamed up with a key founder and nurse in the hospice movement to write the first and only textbook on end-of-life nursing care. That nurse is now a Yolo Hospice board member. Through local and national efforts, the hospice has always led the charge for patient-centered end-of-life care.

“Hope never dies in this process,”



1909 Galileo Court  
Suite A  
Davis, CA 95618  
530-758-5566  
yolohospice.org