

ESSAY

Hospice Care Today: Compassionate or McDonaldized?¹

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It can be said that hospice is both old and new. The word hospice is from the Latin “hospes,” meaning hospitality and has its roots in medieval times when it symbolized a place of shelter for tired or ill travelers from their long journey (The National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, 2010). Today the term hospice has come to mean a philosophy of care that assists a person nearing the end of life and their loved ones, not only a place of respite (Doherty, 2009).

While hospice is relatively new to the United States, it has been in existence in the United Kingdom for over 75 years. The first hospice can be traced to Dublin, Ireland where Sister Mary Aikenhead, a member of the Irish Sisters of Charity, opened a home for the terminally ill in the mid-1800’s. She called the home “hospice” because she viewed death as part of the eternal journey. Word spread of her work and she was invited to London by Cardinal Vaughan in 1900 where the sisters established St. Joseph’s, one of the first hospices in England. Located in London’s East End, today it is a 100-bed hospice facility. This facility has served as a model for other British hospices, most notably St. Christopher’s Hospice. Dame Cicely Saunders established St. Christopher’s hospice after

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