

Dear Editor,

The Board of County Commissioners approved several agreements with area service providers to be included in the worthwhile Senior Support Services pilot program. Hospice of Citrus County is privileged to serve as one of two hospices in service of Citrus County's most vulnerable. Hospice of Citrus County received its agreement in May of this year. A provider agreement with a second hospice was approved during the August 11th Commission meeting. Underlying the August 11th agreement, however, was an amalgam of disinformation aimed at Hospice of Citrus County that seemed to serve as the partial baseline from which the second hospice agreement was deemed necessary by Commissioners.

Upon viewing the video record of the August 11th BOCC meeting, we immediately called upon local Commissioners to clarify this matter. We watched in dismay as Commissioners accepted, what is now understood to have been one sided criticism that Hospice of Citrus County didn't provide services to Alzheimer's patients or afford patient and family physician visits. Additionally, there was the notion that our service mix was inferior because we didn't own a pharmacy.

Here are the facts. Patients diagnosed with end stage Alzheimer's and other dementia-related disease represent more than 15% of our patient census. According to the Agency for Health Care Administration, Hospice of Citrus County presently serves more than 80% of this County's total end of life need. Second, we do provide our patients and families physician visits with a local coalition of doctors. Finally, the notion we don't own a pharmacy is a non issue. By design, we maintain agreements with nearly all the pharmacies in Citrus County so as to move away from the concept of centralization in order to give our patients and families optimum choice and access concerning where they get their prescriptions.

The Board of County Commissioners deserves credit for offering immediate remedy by inviting Hospice of Citrus County to the August 25th Commission meeting to set the record straight. The only question that remains unanswered is from where did this disinformation originate? What's significant is no matter where it began, at no time was Hospice of Citrus County asked or afforded opportunity to respond or otherwise refute this false information prior to the vote. This is not a question concerning choice. Choice is vital for people, faced with end of issues toward making the most informed decisions. However, prior to offering choice, getting the provider facts straight first is vital.

We appreciate all of you who took the time to attend the BOCC meeting in support of Hospice of Citrus County. Indeed, we are as proud of our amalgam of service assets and track record as Citrus County's hometown provider as we are grateful for the community's loving embrace.

With warmest regards,

Anthony J. Palumbo, Chief Executive Officer
Hospice of Citrus County