

Data Provides Opportunities for Productive Relations Between Funeral Service and Hospice

Cordt Kassner, PhD, is a hospice and healthcare industry analyst. He created Hospice Analytics, a Selected Preferred Partner, to provide funeral directors and deathcare professionals with a better understanding of local end-of-life trends. **Jeff Towns** is Director of Market Development for Hospice Analytics with prior experience as CEO of a major hospice and palliative care organization.

What advice do you have for developing relationships with hospice professionals?

Towns: "There's an ethical line that hospices don't want to cross by overtly referring a particular funeral home to families, and funeral directors don't want to cross the line by focusing on monetary gains. But clearly, there is potential for mutually productive relationships here.

"Funeral homes can do a number of things to support both their communities and their hospice partners. For example, hospice is required by regulation to provide grief counseling for 13 months after a death, but not all hospices provide these services to the intensity families may need. Most funeral homes offer much more comprehensive programs, but do they do it in concert with hospice? With their knowledge and resources, funeral homes are in a great position to help strengthen and support hospice counseling.

"Also, most families mourn the loss of a hospice patient long before death occurs. So here's a perfect opportunity for the funeral home to share its preneed and advance planning expertise. By working with hospice to provide resources that help families prepare for death and plan for the ceremony, funeral directors can greatly assist hospice staff, provide an invaluable service to families and generate an enormous amount of goodwill.

"But it requires an outreach effort to educate and inform. I don't think hospice staffs generally understand the funeral process as well as they should. How about inviting them to tour your facility and get to know your staff so as to gain a better idea of what's involved?"

Kassner: "One of the things I more fully realized during Selected's Annual Meeting in Boston last year was the common ground funeral directors



Dr. Cordt Kassner



Jeff Towns

and hospice have in serving the best interests of their communities. There are more areas than I expected where funeral service and hospice overlap. Jeff mentioned the bereavement process, and one of the situations that comes to mind is the shootings in Aurora, CO, last year, where John Horan and his organization did a fantastic job caring for families of victims in concert with local hospices and other providers. This is a great example of working together for the benefit of the community. Unexpected, traumatic death requires a community to pull together, and this was demonstrated in Aurora and, more recently, in Newtown, CT."

How does Hospice Analytics help with this connection between funeral homes and hospices?

Kassner: "Our primary mission is providing the latest hospice and end-of-life information and, most importantly, helping funeral directors understand this data, so they can apply it to their marketing and outreach efforts. For those efforts to be effective, there must be a direct correlation between what the funeral home is doing and the actual care facilities in the community where people are dying. However, we've found many funeral home directors have much to learn about local trends, and our reports meet this need."

Towns: "In years past, a funeral home could pretty well count on handling a certain percentage of local deaths, but with the rise in cremation and changing consumer preferences, all that is changing. We provide data in a way that helps the funeral home fine tune its outreach and better understand its market.

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"For the Selected members we work with, this information opens up a whole new way of building their businesses. It allows them to see their market potential clearly and then accurately measure their success based on hard data."

Kassner: "Selected members are among the most sophisticated funeral home operators in the country, and modern managers expect to be able to connect the dots and tie their firms' efforts and expenditures directly to specific outcomes, whether it be in terms of staff performance, service delivery or community outreach. This need is not new to them, but what we offer is a unique solution, and we've seen tremendous growth in funeral homes utilizing the important data we provide."

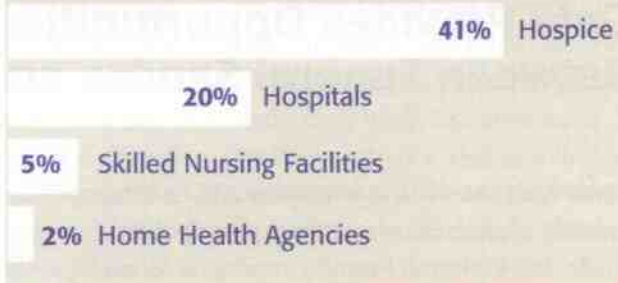
What specific tools and support does Hospice Analytics provide?

Kassner: "Our National Hospice Locator (NHL) is an invaluable tool for funeral directors, as well as the general public, to identify, map and compare services provided by every known hospice in the United States. Typically, state and national hospice websites list only their own members, and the websites of state departments of public health are often difficult to navigate. No other website provides a directory of every known hospice in the country, and the NHL is updated on a daily basis. A few clicks at hospiceanalytics.com can provide a wealth of helpful information.

"Our Funeral Home Market Reports provide easy-to-follow yet highly detailed graphic explanations of death data within specific counties organized by provider type—hospices, hospitals, nursing facilities and home care. This data includes the provider name, location and number of deaths. Plus, our multi-year trend reports allow directors to gain a clearer picture of where their referrals have come from.

"And right now, we are in the final stages of releasing our new online data reporting system called InfoMAX. It allows funeral directors to log in to the Hospice Analytics website anytime, 24/7, and immediately access the latest information and years of data from the counties that comprise their service area. They can download a number of customized reports relative to their unique needs and also add counties to the mix whenever they like. This can help them decide where best to locate their next facility or how to effectively utilize their staff, based on where deaths actually are occurring.

Sixty-Eight Percent of U.S. Deaths Occur with Medicare Providers



"And again, because they can look at this data by provider, by county, and trend it over time, they'll be able to see changes that can help shape their strategic planning for future outreach. InfoMAX also makes it easy to share report data among different office locations when the subscriber's account information is provided to each team member—an effective way to coordinate marketing goals throughout the year.

"We provide webinars for those who would like to walk through the process and better understand what the information means and how it can be strategically applied in various ways. We also are available to personally answer any questions that users might have."

Towns: "As with any new business development tool, it takes some understanding to appreciate the value of our reports. When a business owner asks, 'Why is this information important to me?'; we ask if it would provide a competitive advantage to know specifically where deaths are occurring in the community so outreach efforts can be targeted.

"It's all about how to tailor your outreach efforts and staff time. Marketing is expensive, but knowing where to expend your resources and who best to network with in your community are huge advantages.

"There are many ways funeral professionals can work with hospices without crossing the professional and ethical boundary, including the areas of bereavement support, professional education, consumer education and end-of-life planning. Together, funeral homes and hospices can coordinate and share best practices to serve families even better. But the first steps are getting to know each other, understanding each others' roles and finding a common ground on which to serve." ▲

As a Preferred Partner, Hospice Analytics offers special pricing to Selected members. Call 517-290-0853 or email jtowns@hospiceanalytics.com for information.