

As population ages, hospice care grows

By Sammy Caiola, Sacramento Bee

Mary Miller is full of opinions. During her weekly visits with hospice volunteer Joe Lenihan, the 88-year-old doesn't hesitate to speak her mind – solicited or not. She'll talk the ear off of a wrong-number caller, and she's known affectionately around the neighborhood as "Mean Old Mom."

"There are days when Mary is a little cantankerous – it's not all sunshine and lollipops," Lenihan said. "It can be a difficult time for some folks, and to share that with people is a real joy."

Miller has been in hospice, an at-home care service provided to patients in their final days, since her congestive heart failure was deemed terminal in January. She chose the option because she wanted to remain in the McKinley Park house where she's lived for 37 years, the past 15 without the company of her late husband, Henry.

Over the past decade, the hospice industry has seen substantial growth with the aging baby boomer population. Adults over 50 are expected to make up 20 percent of the population by 2030, and 90 percent of Americans want to grow older at home, according to a recent report by AARP, formerly the American Association of Retired Persons.

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