Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization
Quarterly Newsletter

Letter from Executive Director Sara Dado

As I write this, it is finally starting to look and feel like autumn across Illinois! I find this season to be a great opportunity to pause and reflect upon the year's work. This will be our last newsletter of 2025 and with that comes a few important updates!

In September, we said a bittersweet goodbye to Merilee Smith, IL-HPCO board chair and Education Committee Chair. After a long and impressive career in hospice, Merilee is off to enjoy a new phase of life- Retirement! I know I will personally miss her leadership, her commitment to hospice care and her collaborative spirit working with the board of directors. On behalf of the entire IL-HPCO board, we thank Merilee for her tireless work on behalf of IL-HPCO, her contributions to hospice care across the state and we wish her all the best in the years ahead.

Next, we welcome our new IL-HPCO Board of Director Co-Chairs- Carrie Bill from AccentCare and Fawn Hendershott from Uplifted Care. Carrie and Fawn are both active and experienced board members who have been serving on the executive committee for the past few years. I look forward to working more closely with both Carrie and Fawn as they guide us into 2026, where we already have an active and exciting plan of action. We also welcome Jen McIlrath from Transitions Care to the executive committee as IL-HPCO's new Vice Chair. Jen has been an active and vocal new board member this past year and her clinical experience and knowledge has been extremely valuable to our state advocates.

2025 has been one of IL-HPCO's busiest and most active years ever. I have absolutely loved seeing so many of you throughout the year. Whether on screen at a webinar, in person at a Regional Meeting or throughout the day at our annual meeting, one of the best parts of my job is seeing the smiles and spirits of each person who is out there every day caring for the sick and dying, making sure that the true mission of hospice stays alive and vibrant, despite the challenges that we may face So, as always, I thank you for your work and look forward to seeing you soon at another IL-HPCO event.

We aren't done with 2025 yet though! Please take a few minutes to read through this newsletter and learn more about the important events that are happening throughout the remainder of 2025. Registration is open for all upcoming events so I encourage you to visit our website at www.il-hpco.org to learn more and get signed up! Lastly, we will again be doing a year end fundraising drive to raise money to continue even greater work in 2026. Watch your inboxes for more information coming in November.

Until then, remember the words of one of my all-time favorite characters:

"I am so glad I live in world where there are Octobers." - Anne Shirley, Anne of Green Gables

Keep breathing and take a few moments this week to enjoy the beauty of the season.

Education Update from Katie Lord

Education Update: Strengthening Our Community Through Learning
At IL-HPCO, education is at the heart of our mission to support hospice and palliative care professionals across Illinois. Each quarter, we're proud to offer opportunities that foster professional growth, provide practical tools, and create spaces for meaningful connection.

Recent Highlights
This quarter has been filled with valuable learning experiences and inspiring conversations. Check out photos below.

- **Summer Regional Meeting at Hospice of Southern Illinois**
    - We had an incredible turn out, with a diverse group of attendees from several organizations in Southern IL as we explored the possibility of MAID in Illinois.
- **"Care and Conscience: Supporting Patients through Ethical and Cultural Lenses" CEU Event**
    - We were so fortunate to have Dr. Mona Tareen join us in person from Abu Dhabi to share her research and insight at this impactful event. Our members were so engaged with the discussions on End of Life Non-disclosure, Ethic and Autonomy in the Middle East.

These programs not only provided continuing education but also offered a chance for members to collaborate and share insights that strengthen our community of care.

Upcoming Opportunities
We're excited about the months ahead and the opportunities they hold for continued learning. We are focusing on providing discipline specific trainings and networking opportunities in the next few months, so keep your calendars open for the following events:

- **Bereavement Perspectives Workshop at Vitas Hospice – October 16, Lombard IL**
    - Bereavement professionals of any discipline are welcome to join this event that will focus on strengthening bereavement care options for Illinois Families!
- **Fall Regional Meeting: HOPE tool workshop at Integrated Palliative & Hospice – November 7, Libertyville**
    - This will be an interactive workshop to share tips and tricks 30 days post Go Live of the Hospice Hope tool. Join other providers to learn how things are going and take back invaluable insight to navigate unexpected challenges.

Be sure to save the dates and take advantage of these offerings—your participation ensures that our entire field continues to grow together!

Get Involved: Join the Education Committee
If you're passionate about shaping meaningful educational opportunities for hospice and palliative care professionals, we encourage you to consider joining the **IL-HPCO Education Committee**. Committee members help identify emerging needs, plan events, and guide the development of resources that directly support our members. It's also a great way to network with colleagues and make a lasting impact on our community.

If you'd like to learn more or get involved, please reach out—we'd love to welcome your voice at the table.
We're grateful for the dedication of hospice and palliative care professionals who continue to show up for patients, families, and one another. Through education, we build resilience, sharpen our skills, and ensure exceptional end-of-life care across Illinois.

We look forward to seeing you at our upcoming events—and perhaps welcoming you to the Education Committee!

Bereavement Workshop: Bereavement Care Perspectives

Join bereavement professionals from across Illinois for an afternoon of connection, collaboration, and insight. This interactive workshop features a dynamic presentation by three seasoned experts bringing diverse experiences and compassionate approaches to grief support.

Patrice Martin - Director of Grief Support at Lightways Hospice & Serious Illness Care

Dr. Wanda Henry Jenkins - Bereavement Manager Vitas Hospice Prg. 31 & 38

Rev. Joe Green - Corporate Director of Spiritual Care and Bereavement at Unity Hospice & Palliative Care

Thursday, October 16, 2025, 1 PM - 4 PM

VITAS Healthcare 580 Waters Edge, Lombard, IL

www.il-hpco.org

REGIONAL MEETING

Friday November 7, 2025
11:00 a.m. - 1:00 p.m. CT
Integrated Palliative and Hospice
151 W Golf Rd Libertyville, IL 60048

Topic of Discussion:
Hospice HOPE Tool Workshop
30 Days Post Implementation

Workshop Leader:
Katie Lord, RN
IL-HPCO Education Coordinator

This workshop will be limited to 50 attendees.

Members: Free
Non-Members: $25

Visit www.il-hpco.org to register.

Any questions? Email Sara Dado sdado@il-hpco.org

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization · Integrated Palliative and Hospice Home Healthcare Services

Government Affairs Update from Ellen Byrne

Government Affairs Update: Advancing Care Through Advocacy
At IL-HPCO, advocacy is at the heart of how we support our members and the patients and families you serve. This fall, we're excited to share important updates on the policy front — both in Springfield and Washington — that will shape the future of hospice and palliative care in Illinois.

IL-HPCO in Washington, DC
In September, IL-HPCO leaders Sara Dado and Ellen Byrne represented our community at the Alliance for Care at Home's advocacy day in Washington, DC. They met with federal lawmakers and their staff to deliver a clear message: hospice must remain a standalone benefit under traditional Medicare. Integrating hospice into Medicare Advantage would be harmful to patients, providers, and the long-term sustainability of the Medicare program. We enjoy this yearly trip and the key relationships our meetings build with members of Congress.

Partnering with State Agencies
IL-HPCO recently submitted formal comments to the Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services in support of funding for hospice workforce development in rural communities. This recommendation was made as the state prepares its application for federal funding through HHS's Rural Health Transformation Program. Strengthening the hospice and palliative care workforce is critical to ensuring patients in rural communities of Illinois can access compassionate end-of-life care and has the potential to reduce the financial pressures that rural hospitals are facing.

We also urged the Illinois Department on Aging to include expanding hospice and palliative care access as a priority in EngAged Illinois, the state's new 10-year multisector plan on aging. By embedding our services into this plan, Illinois can better prepare to meet the needs of a rapidly growing older adult population. Both Director of Policy & Government Affairs, Ellen Byrne, and former IL-HPCO President, Mary Kay Sheehan, have been significantly involved in the development of this critical state initiative.

Building Momentum for 2026 Legislation
Looking ahead to next year's legislative session, IL-HPCO is preparing to advance two legislative initiatives. The first is a bill to establish state standards for community-based palliative care. We are currently collaborating with the IL State Medical Society and the IL Health & Hospital Association and the IL Hospice & Palliative Care Advisory Board to ensure that the needs of all stakeholders are supported in developing this legislation.

The second initiative is a bill to provide stronger safety protections for home-based care teams. IL-HPCO is working with the IL HomeCare & Hospice Council and the American Nurses Association-Illinois to amend the Illinois Health Care Violence Prevention Act to better protect healthcare professionals providing care in the home. Our members' clinical staff face unique safety challenges in community settings, and this bill would ensure stronger safeguards for those working outside a healthcare facility.

The Power of Collaboration
All of these efforts highlight the vital role of IL-HPCO's **Government Affairs Committee** and our partnerships with other advocacy organizations and government agencies. Together, we are advancing policy priorities that protect providers, expand access, and strengthen care for patients and families experiencing serious illnesses across Illinois.

As we move toward 2026, IL-HPCO remains committed to ensuring that hospice and palliative care have a strong voice at the table — and that our members' expertise and compassion continue to guide public policy.

Sara Dado, Executive Director of IL-HPCO, is pictured with Rep. Bill Foster and other advocates at Hospice on the Hill advocacy day.

In Memory of Mary Runge

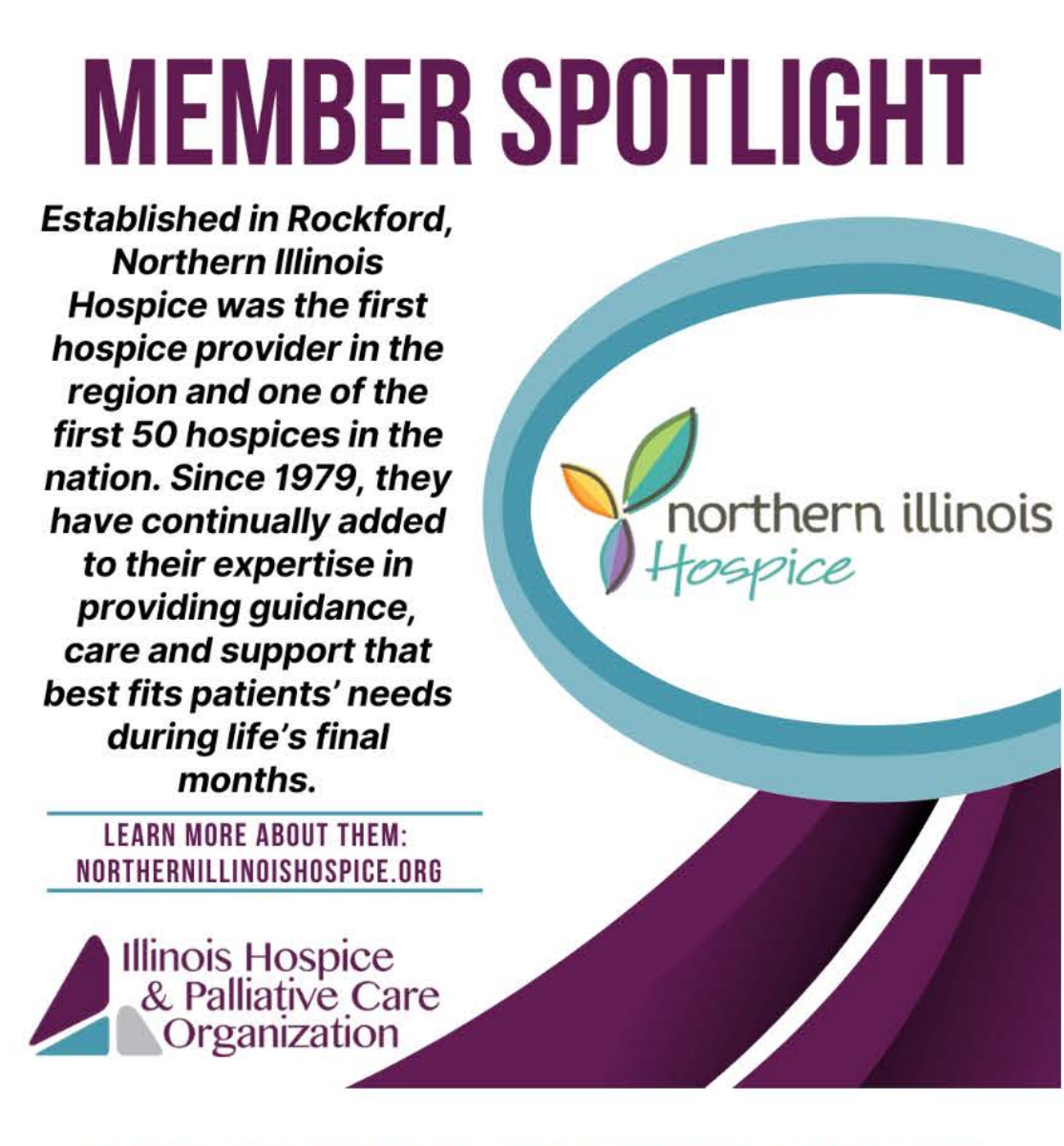
Mary Runge was a key force in expanding hospice care in Illinois and Wisconsin, uniting communities to improve access to compassionate, quality support at end of life. As Executive Director of Horizon Hospice, she helped launch the Greater Illinois Pediatric Palliative Care Coalition to serve children with serious illnesses. Mary's legacy of compassion, leadership, and advocacy lives on.

July 25: Regional Meeting at Hospice of Southern Illinois

Medical Aid in Dying: Illinois' New Bill and Lessons from Other States

Sept. 18: "Care and Conscience: Supporting Patients Through Ethical and Cultural Lenses"

Quarter 3 Member Spotlights

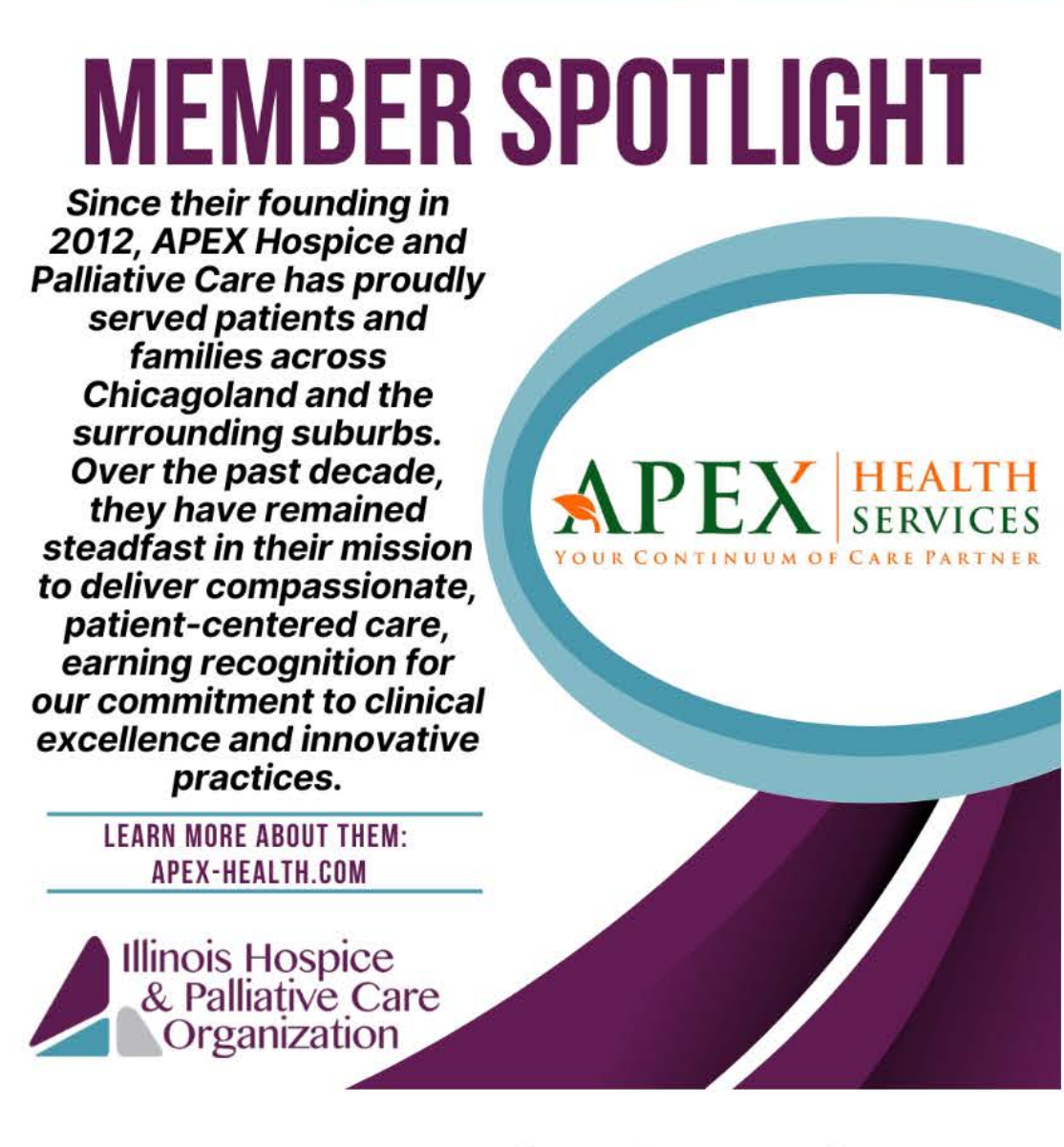


MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Established in Rockford, Northern Illinois Hospice was the first hospice provider in the region and one of the first 50 hospices in the nation. Since 1979, they have continually added to their expertise in providing guidance, care and support that best fits patients' needs during life's final months.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM:
NORTHERNILLINOISHOSPICE.ORG

northern illinois Hospice
Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

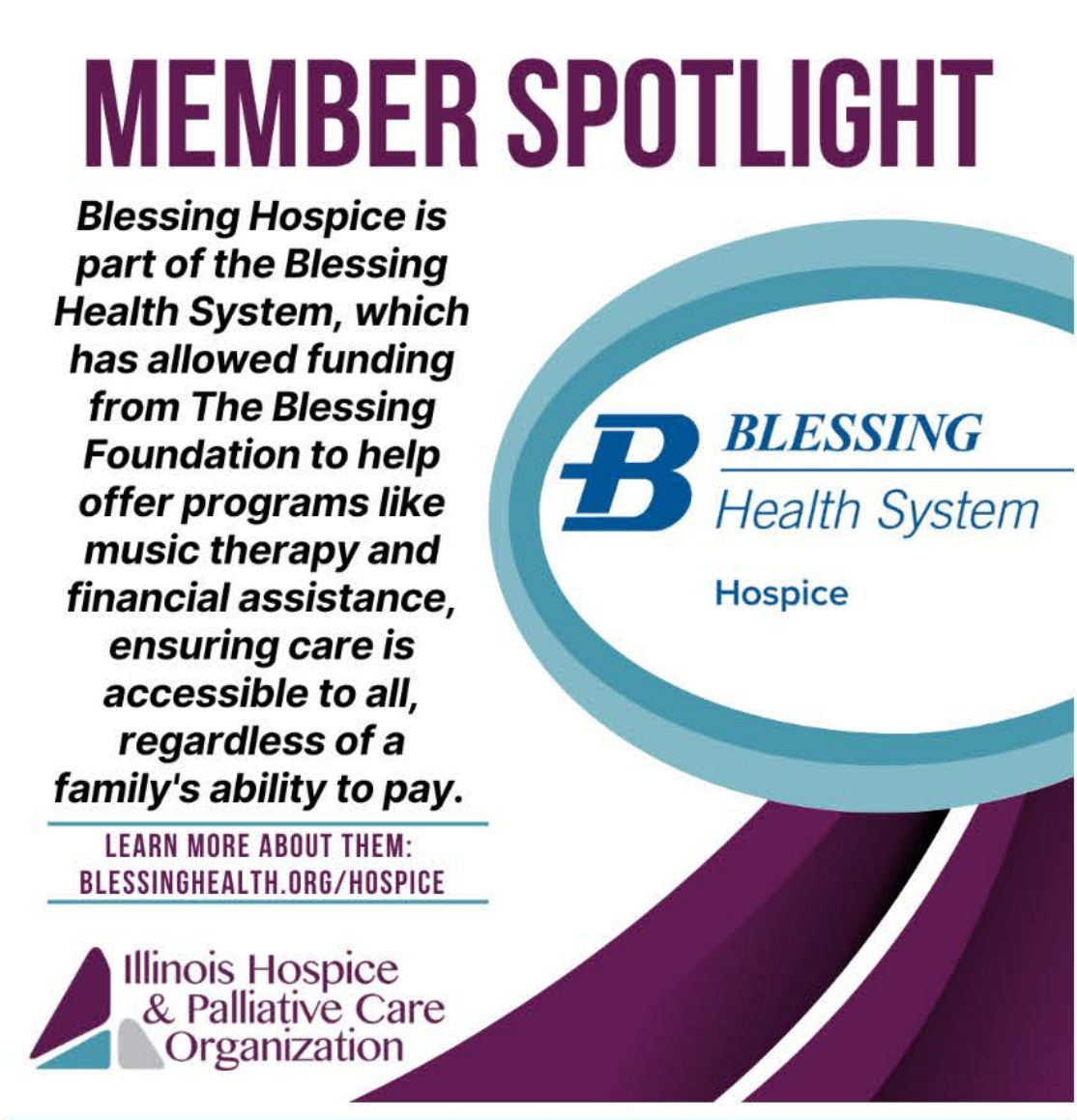


MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Since their founding in 2012, APEX Hospice and Palliative Care has proudly served patients and families across Chicagoland and the surrounding suburbs. Over the past decade, they have remained steadfast in their mission to deliver compassionate, patient-centered care, earning recognition for our commitment to clinical excellence and innovative practices.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM:
APEX-HEALTH.COM

APEX HEALTH SERVICES
YOUR CONTINUUM OF CARE PARTNER
Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization



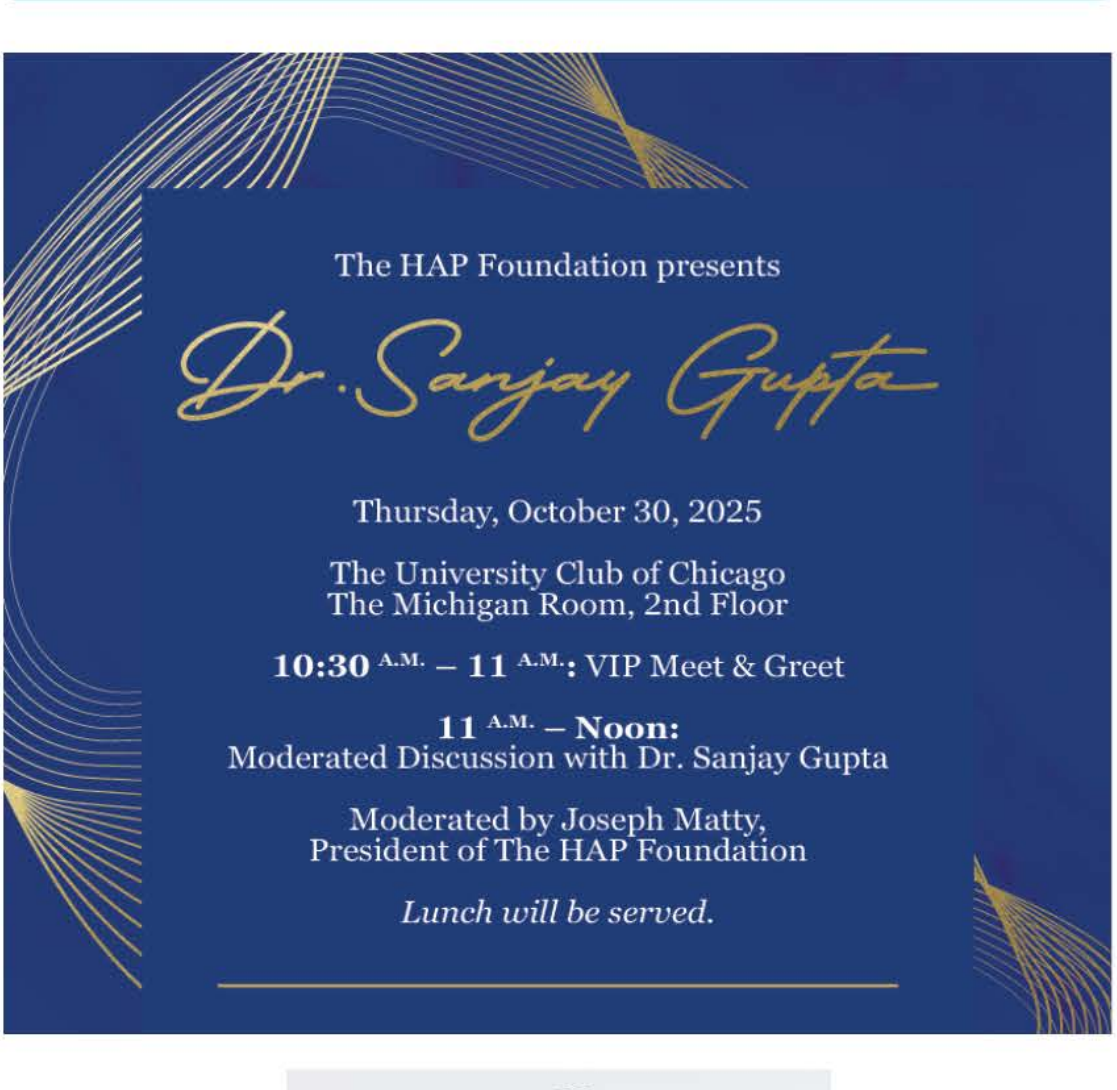
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Blessing Hospice is part of the Blessing Health System, which has allowed funding from The Blessing Foundation to help offer programs like music therapy and financial assistance, ensuring care is accessible to all, regardless of a family's ability to pay.

LEARN MORE ABOUT THEM:
BLESSINGHEALTH.ORG/HOSPICE

BLESSING Health System
Hospice
Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

Special Rate for IL-HPCO: Dr. Sanjay Gupta LIVE on 10/30



The HAP Foundation presents

Dr. Sanjay Gupta

Thursday, October 30, 2025

The University Club of Chicago
The Michigan Room, 2nd Floor

10:30 A.M. – 11 A.M.: VIP Meet & Greet

11 A.M. – Noon:
Moderated Discussion with Dr. Sanjay Gupta

Moderated by Joseph Matty,
President of The HAP Foundation

Lunch will be served.

The HAP Foundation presents Dr. Sanjay Gupta

Join HAP for a conversation with Dr. Sanjay Gupta, Emmy Award-Winning Neurosurgeon and CNN Chief Medical Correspondent. Dr. Gupta will be in conversation exploring the intersection of health and storytelling. Register with a special partner rate of $125 for IL-HPCO members and the community by 10/22.

Register

Illinois Hospice & Palliative Care Organization

Our mailing address is:
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