



It's about how you LIVE!

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The mission of Hospicare & Palliative Care Services is to bring medical expertise and compassionate, respectful care to people and their loved ones at any stage of a life-threatening illness and to provide information and education about advanced illness, dying and bereavement to the entire community.

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Message from the Director

Teamwork at Its Best

HOSPICARE WORK IS A BIT DIFFERENT from the work of most health services and human services agencies. One unique element is that we provide our services in teams. Every Hospicare patient has a team of care providers consisting of, at a minimum, a physician, nurse, social worker and spiritual care provider. The patient's core team is often joined by an aide, a musician, volunteers, any number of therapists, and a grief counselor. When the patient is a resident at the Nina K. Miller Hospicare Residence, the team expands to include the residence staff.

The team meets at least once every two weeks to review the patient's progress and to revise the patient's care plan to meet needs as they evolve. Because of the variety of perspectives the team members bring to the table, we are able to respond much more holistically to the many issues and concerns that arise at the end of life. At its best, it's a symphonic approach that goes beyond just health care and supports patients and families at their deepest and most human level.

The teamwork doesn't stop there—and neither does the concern for our patients and their families. Those of us on the administrative side work to maintain the business practices and working conditions that best facilitate patient care. Our Board of Directors establishes policies and provides guidance for maintaining a consistent focus on our agency's important mission and vision. Our development and communications staff members provide crucial information about our services to the community and forge strong bonds with those we serve. Our many incredibly generous financial contributors, including the swimmers and boaters in our annual Women Swimmin' event, are likewise invaluable members of the team, without whom many of our services would not be possible.

As the story about the Levitskiy family in this issue illustrates, our all-embracing approach to team-based care brings comfort and support to the family as well as the patient. The many different aspects of end-of-life care can be addressed by the appropriate team member as issues arise, and the family is never alone in their time of need.

Hospicare board members like our current president, Linda Pasto, who is profiled on page 6, contribute in their own way to the overall excellence of our team. In Linda's case, her many years as a respected nursing educator make her especially able to understand and enhance our mission through her compassionate, professional support of our clinical staff.

If you are reading this, you too are a member (or potential member) of the Hospicare team. We welcome you. Together, let us work to ensure that our friends, neighbors and loved ones—and ultimately we ourselves—receive the best care possible at the end of life.

Dale Johnson



STOBHAN MCCLORY



On the cover:

Hospicare's yearly memorial event Illuminations brings the community together in our beautiful gardens to remember loved ones who have died. We join together in song, spoken word and the lighting of luminarias.

All are invited to this year's event, June 4, at the Nina K. Miller Hospicare Center, 172 East King Road, Ithaca. The event starts at 7:30 p.m.

COVER PHOTO BY GRANGER MACY

Women Swimmin' Set for August 8



The 12th Women Swimmin' for Hospicare is only four months away! On Saturday, August 8, more than 300 women will swim across Cayuga Lake in Ithaca to raise money to support Hospicare services. They will be escorted by more than 100 kayaks and other boats in a fundraising event that has come to be one of the premier summer experiences in the Finger Lakes.

Registration happens online at www.womenswimmin.org and begins at 6:00 a.m. on Monday, May 4, for women who wish to swim across the lake for Hospicare. But plan to get up early: last year all available spots were filled in less than three hours! Registration for boaters begins a week later, on Monday, May 11.

Announcing Women Swimmin' Laps



We are pleased to announce that we've added a new addition to the Women Swimmin' family: Women Swimmin' Laps for Hospicare. This new opportunity allows women who aren't able to swim across the lake on August 8 to swim in pools (with a certified lifeguard) to raise money for Hospicare.

If you would like to participate in Women Swimmin' Laps for Hospicare, you can find

an appropriate pool, set your own distance goal, and let your friends and family know you are swimmin' for Hospicare. Swim at your own pace anytime and for as many days as you want between May 5 and August 8. Registration for Women Swimmin' Laps is ongoing from May 5 until May 31.

To learn more about Women Swimmin' (either the lake or the lap version) visit www.womenswimmin.org.

Jeff Collins Retires from Hospicare



Last December, longtime Hospicare social worker Jeff Collins retired after 21 years with the agency.

Jeff joined Hospicare in 1993 when we were a small organization with a handful of employees. From the very beginning, his dedication to patients and to social work made a real difference to all who came in contact with him. He co-chaired the Ethics Committee for many years,

contributing thoughtful suggestions grounded in years of Buddhist studies and a deep interest in ethical and philosophical challenges.

As Hospicare grew and expanded, Jeff contributed his wisdom and experience to each phase of the organization's growth, reaching out to new employees and supporting our patients and their families. To his coworkers, Jeff offered immense kindness. His ability to be completely "in the moment" was a gift to us all. To his patients and their families, he offered wise guidance and boundless compassion. He will be greatly missed.

Hospicare Establishes New Lecture Series



Sandra Lipsitz Bem

Hospicare is pleased to announce the establishment of the Sandra Lipsitz Bem Lecture Series on Compassionate Care and End-of-Life Issues. Through this yearly lecture, given by outstanding professionals dealing with end-of-life issues, we hope to expand our community's awareness and understanding of death, dying, and the possibilities and limits of contemporary medicine.

The inaugural lecture will take place in early October. The guest speaker will be Robert Wood, MD. A faculty member of the University of Washington, Dr. Wood practiced internal medicine for 40 years in Washington state and also was the director of HIV/AIDS for Public Health, Seattle and King County, for 24 years. He is a member of the board for Compassion & Choices of Washington.

The lecture series is possible through an endowment set up by Daryl Bem, the husband of Ithaca psychologist Sandra Bem. Diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2010, Sandra chose to end her own life last year before the disease became too debilitating for a meaningful quality of life.

More information on the Bem lecture will be forthcoming in the next few months.

Finishing Well

One Family's Experience with Hospicare

BY ALEXIS BEEBE | PHOTOS BY MARK COSTA



The decision to choose hospice is far from easy. It is an emotional time for families, during which coming together is the key to support. This was the case for the Levitskiy family, whose husband and father, Mikhail, died on Hospicare's service in October 2014. Recently I sat down with Mikhail's wife of 50 years, Anna, and their two daughters, Natalia Kanichuk and Luda Shevchuk, to talk about Mikhail and the family's experience with Hospicare.

The Levitskiy family immigrated to the United States from Ukraine in 1990 and settled in Cortland, where Mikhail Levitskiy built a beautiful legacy. He took great pride in his family, which he valued above all else, Natalia said. She also recalled how he prioritized giving back to others. Mikhail helped build the church where the family later held his celebration of life. In his free time, he would go there to lend a hand. "He would help the neighbors, too, with anything they needed done," Luda said, reflecting on her father's gregarious nature that united the family and their community.

Mikhail was on Hospicare's services for just four days, yet the family is eager to share their experience with others. They are grateful, they said, for the care and concern of Hospicare nurses and staff. "The staff responded so quickly from the first day. They were so friendly, and so very understanding," said Natalia. Two nurses visited the family: Carrie Szewczyk, RN, Mikhail's admissions nurse; and Corey Stevens, RN, his primary nurse. Also

(L to R) Natalia Kanichuk, Alexis Beebe and Luda Shevchuk look through the photo album of Mikhail's life.

"They weren't coming here because it was their job, they were coming here because their heart was here."

assisting in Mikhail's care was Danielle Parker, LPN; and Jennifer Willamee, LMSW, social worker.

Throughout the four days, the family experienced many emotional ups and downs, often unsure what state Mikhail was in. Hospicare staff offered a comforting presence for the family during that difficult time, they said. "They weren't coming here because it was their job," Natalia said. "They were coming here because their heart was here. It was never a bother for them to help us out."

Mikhail had been hospitalized for a heart condition for four weeks when the family called Hospicare. "You could tell he wasn't comfortable in the hospital anymore," Natalia said. "So when we heard about hospice, we knew that would be a better option."

Making that call was difficult, the family said, but they knew they had to make the best choice for Mikhail. "We didn't want to accept the idea that it was time for hospice," Natalia said, "but when looking at all of the options, we knew it would be the best. We chose Hospicare because they would be coming to the house, they would give us help, and everything would be provided."

Hospicare was able to react quickly with the appropriate medical care, supplies and expertise to make the transition easier for the Levitskiy family and to provide services at their request and preference. "They were here for whatever we needed to take care of him," Natalia remembered, "and they were very good at keeping us informed. Even afterward, Jen Willamee came and offered us bereavement information and helped us with the whole process."

Although the amount of time Mikhail was on hospice services was short, Natalia said the support and assurance of Hospicare's staff made a real difference. "We would recommend this service to





Anna Levitskiy points out a picture to Luda and Alexis.

anybody,” she said. “We know that it can be scary, but Hospicare provides the best service for patients, and families too. Every service was offered to us without hesitation, and they never had a problem taking the time to explain everything that was happening.”

During his time on Hospicare’s service, Mikhail received a gift that was much bigger than anything the Hospicare staff could provide: his great-grandson was born on the first day Mikhail returned home. “I felt like my father was just waiting to see him,” Luda said.

The importance of family to Mikhail was clear to primary nurse

Corey Stevens when she visited for the first time. “The support and love from the entire large family was very evident,” she said. “It was beautiful to see so many people surrounding him.”

Surrounded by photos of Mikhail’s life and the strong, inspira-

tional words of his family, I could feel his spirit smiling down on us. Tears came and went, but the memories of Mikhail shined through the heartfelt smiles of his family. Family members showed me a book they had compiled of Mikhail’s life, beautifully bound with his portrait on the front. The book is full of cherished memories from his early years all the way through to his time of sickness. On the last page, a Bible verse in Ukrainian accompanies a black-and-white portrait of Mikhail. I asked Luda to translate it. “I ran my race,” she read wistfully, “and I finished well.”



Support When It’s Needed the Most

As the Levitskiy family discovered, Hospicare can help patients and their loved ones in many ways through a team-based approach. Our care-team members bring with them a great array of professional skills and training—and many years of practical experience helping people deal with end-of-life situations. Their number one concern is to offer the services that are needed when they are needed.

“The best way for patients to ensure that they get all the care they need in a timely manner is to call Hospicare as soon as possible,” says Leah Gugino, RN, CHPN, Hospicare’s director of patient services. “Our team members can be more helpful when they have sufficient time to build a trusting relationship with the patient and family before the situation becomes critical.”

The Hospicare team offers help when it’s needed the most by:

- **Supporting patients.** Our team members walk beside our patients through the final stage of life by providing medical, nursing, psychological, social, spiritual and bereavement support. Our trained volunteers offer an added layer of help that many patients and family members find especially uplifting.
- **Supporting family members.** Our care team provides emotional and spiritual support for family members and others engaged in providing patient care. Our team members teach them skills they need to care for their loved one, as well as new ways of coping with stress.
- **Helping patients find comfort and pain relief.** Our nurses are experts in managing symptoms, including pain, anxiety, nausea and restlessness. Our goal is for patients to live as normal a life as possible in their own homes or in home-like surroundings.
- **Alleviating financial concerns.** Hospice care covers diagnosis-related medication, oxygen, medical supplies and equipment, as well as the full range of services provided by our care team. Medicare and Medicaid hospice benefits pay nearly all costs of services. That includes items not normally covered by the regular Medicare and Medicaid programs, including the cost of medications related to the hospice diagnosis and durable medical equipment such as electric beds, walkers and wheelchairs. Many private insurance policies have a hospice benefit that covers most charges, less deductibles and co-insurance.
- **Reducing the need for emergency room visits.** Our nurses help patients manage their symptoms and anticipate potential problems. Our on-call nurses are available any time of the day or night.

Hospicare Board Member Profile: Linda Pasto

BY FRANK KELLY



Residence: 30 years “staying put” in Lansing

Family: Husband, Ed; children Tim, Jamie, Beth and Jennifer; daughters-in-law Megan and Lindsay; grandchildren Alex, Noah and Savanna; dogs Brody and Coco; sponsored children in Guatemala and India; former and current students

Occupation: Adjunct faculty, TC3; retired professor of nursing, TC3

Pastimes: Volunteering, working out, traveling, gardening, spending time with grandkids and watching sports

Motto: Make a difference every day.

Years on Hospicare Board:

5 years; current board president and member of the Professional Nursing Standards Committee and the Cortland Transition Committee

LINDA PASTO ADMITS she’s not good at sitting still. Maybe it’s because her family moved several times during her childhood. It’s one of the reasons she and her husband, Ed, have lived in the same house in Lansing since the mid-1980s—she wanted her own children to have roots, she says.

Linda enjoyed working with children from an early age and started college as an education major, switching to nursing, and ultimately graduating with a dual major in nursing and child and family studies. The daughter of a nurse, and a distant relative of Clara Barton, Linda says nursing was “kinda in my genes.”

“Working as a nurse turned me on fire,” she remembers. “I felt a palpable excitement the first time I put on the uniform.” Later, as a full-time professor of nursing at Tompkins Cortland Community College (TC3), Linda shared her passion with generations of students. Though now officially retired, she continues to teach part-time as an adjunct.

Like many who become involved in the hospice movement, Linda’s first exposure was through friends and family whose lives were directly touched by hospice. Both her mother and mother-in-law were under hospice care when they died, and several of her former TC3 students have worked for Hospicare. “Many of them stayed in touch,” she says. “I saw how committed they were and how fulfilled.” In fact, she cites having even closer contact with these nurses as one of the many rewards of being on the Hospicare board.

Linda’s involvement with Hospicare’s board began five years ago. “At the time, our family was struggling with a great many problems of our own,” she says, “but becoming involved with Hospicare felt like the right thing to do.”

The problems Linda had to cope with included adjusting to life with a permanent ostomy after surgery for Crohn’s disease, losing 155 pounds as part of her recovery and discovering her husband, Ed, had a serious health condition. Surviving these major health traumas served as a wake-up call for

both Linda and Ed and gave them a new sense of purpose. “We feel blessed,” she says. “And it’s important for us to give back and to make a difference, every day.”

Although she has a long history of involvement in various organizations and projects, Linda had never served on the board of a nonprofit organization until she joined Hospicare. Not knowing what to expect, she says it’s been quite a learning experience. A year as vice president helped her prepare for her current position as board president—a role she calls enjoyable but challenging, particularly in light of Hospicare’s expansion of service to Cortland County.

Linda sees the service expansion as a “win-win” for Hospicare and for the Hospice Foundation of Cortland County, which has been working with Hospicare to support hospice services in Cortland County. She points to TC3 as a model for how Tompkins and Cortland Counties have partnered effectively in the past.

“This last year, we’ve had working meetings between Hospicare staff and the Hospice Foundation of Cortland County board members at TC3,” she says. “TC3 is symbolic common ground. I believe it’s essential for everyone from both organizations to feel they have a meaningful role and voice.”

As president of the board, Linda is focused on how Hospicare can achieve short-term goals pertaining to service expansion and at the same time prepare for the future. Her priorities include finding creative ways to increase revenue, developing a five-year strategic plan and recruiting the best volunteers to accomplish the organization’s mission. She strives to make meetings productive and to promote discussion. “I want our board meetings to be more than just listening to reports. I want us to talk about issues and for everyone to contribute their perspective,” she says.

Sacred Moments in Hospice Work

BY EDIE REAGAN, LMSW, M.DIV

When someone learns that I work for Hospicare, they usually pause and say something like, “That must be so depressing.” How can I explain that, actually, quite the opposite is true?

Honored. Inspired. Privileged. Grateful. Over and over again, these are words that we on the Hospicare staff use to describe what it is like to journey with our patients and family members. While aspects of this work are heartbreaking at times, those of us privileged to do hospice work feel that, at its deepest level, it can be beautiful, profoundly meaningful, and yes, even life-giving.

I love that so much of our work takes place sitting at the kitchen table or on the living room couch with our patients and their families. It is a singular blessing to be invited into people’s lives at such an intimate moment. Before entering a patient’s room or knocking on the door of their home, I try to take a moment to pause, breathe and bring to mind the sacred nature of this time.

As chaplain on the interdisciplinary hospice care team, my primary focus is simply to be present to patients and to listen intently. In doing this, I serve as the lucky recipient of many treasured stories. What a gift it is to listen to someone sift through their experiences, recounting their blessings and struggles and, in the telling, making meaning of their lives. There are many “holy moments” to be found in this listening.

While each of us is aware that we will die one day, we can easily push off this reality into some vague and distant future. It is a rare gift to talk with someone who is consciously standing at the edge of this mysterious threshold. During our conversations, some patients speak of significant experiences they have had earlier in their lives that continue to impact them during their final days.

I had hardly removed my coat recently when a patient called out from his recliner, “Have you ever spoken to an angel?”



Edie Reagan visits with Hospicare patient Mary Ellen Carollo.

He went on to recount a time during World War II when he experienced a numinous presence walking with him along a beach in the Philippines. His eyes glistened as the power of that memory reached through the years and stirred his heart once again.

One woman told about feeling afraid as a young girl while living away from home at a boarding school. Lying in her bed one night, she had a profound experience. She said, “I felt as if I was being cradled in the hand of God.” Seven decades later, as she was facing her own death, that experience was still bringing her immense consolation.

Another patient talked about caring for her husband who was very ill. The moment before his death, she saw him gaze up to the ceiling with a look of amazement and joy on his face. Her memory of his expression gave her hope and helped her to believe that something beautiful awaited her beyond this life.

Sometimes patients offer a glimpse of what they sense awaits them on the “other side.” One woman quietly remarked that she did not fear death anymore, because she had come to believe that she would live on

as a “small flame of love” burning within the hearts of those dearest to her. Another patient spoke of feeling a strong pull to let himself drift gently down a river, afloat in perfect ease and comfort. Yet another felt as if she were gazing off into the countryside. She mused, “It’s as if there’s something lovely waiting for me there, just over the hill.”

I sense that it is because I come to people in the role of chaplain or spiritual counselor that they feel free to disclose such treasured personal stories, held close to the heart. Our time together creates a safe space for sharing these tender revelations and blesses us both. Receiving them rekindles my own spirit, and in the telling and the being heard, these experiences can come alive again for patients, bringing them comfort, strength and peace once more.

Did You Know?

You can make a referral to hospice at any time. There is no cost or obligation for an evaluation to determine if you or your loved one is appropriate for hospice services, and there is no need to wait for a doctor to make the referral.

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Women Swimmin' Set for August 8

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Wish List

We offer our deepest gratitude for this community's generosity and humbly submit our wish list. A complete list of items can be found on our website: <http://www.hospicare.org/our-wish-list/>

- **White washcloths (new only):** The patients in our Residence go through many washcloths in a day. Our rigorous standards of washing mean that our washcloths wear out very quickly, so we are always in need of more. The white color allows us to use bleach, both sanitizing them and allowing them to last longer.
- **Matching placemat and napkin sets (new only):** When serving our patients a meal in our Residence, we set a tray with a cloth placemat and napkin, both to provide practical hygiene and to create a lovely dining experience. We are asking for matching placemat and napkin sets in Hospicare's colors of brown, tan, sage green or burgundy. Please note: we can only accept *new* placemat and napkin sets.
- **Portable GPS units:** Our nurses, aides and other members of the care team visit the majority of our patients in their homes throughout Tompkins and Cortland counties. Portable GPS units can help them find a patient's house much more quickly and allow them to use more of their time interacting with the patient. Visit our online wish list (at the URL listed above) to access our Amazon wish list for our suggested GPS unit.