

Spiritual Care Helps Patients, Families Through Tough Times

What spiritual support means in the context of hospice is something many patients have difficulty understanding, at least until they encounter hospice spiritual care professionals and volunteers, according to the Rev. Linda Siddall, the chaplain and director of spiritual care.



“Dying is at its heart a sacred act. It is itself a time, a space and process of surrender and transformation.”

—Frank Ostaseski, founder of the Zen Hospice Project and the Metta Institute

In fact, she said, the admitting team at Mission Hospice & Home Care no longer asks patients or their families if they want to see a chaplain.

“They say, ‘Our chaplain will give you a courtesy call,’” she explained. “With all patients, including agnostics and atheists, our job is to discover what gets them through the tough times. That usually involves building trust first, and then deeply listening to what they care about.”

The Rev. Lara Wheless, who assists Siddall as relief chaplain, said Siddall usually makes the first call to the family.

“If they say no, we don’t go,” she said. “They know what they need better than we do. If someone says they’re atheist, that’s completely fine, but they may still want to talk, or their families may have needs.”

Chaplaincy also involves working with other clergy of the patient’s choice or helping arrange for services. Siddall also acts as a consultant and resource for several specially trained volunteers, including two Buddhist priests and several lay ministers from the Catholic and Episcopalian traditions.

Continued on page 3

Faith-Based Outreach Aims At Underserved Communities

Mission Hospice & Home Care has always reached out to the traditionally underserved African-American and Hispanic communities, but a new initiative is aimed at reaching those communities through their pastors and churches.

The Faith-Based Outreach Committee, started in 2009, has been working with a number of local churches, resulting in new Hispanic and African-American patient care volunteers, said the Rev. Linda Siddall, Mission Hospice’s chaplain and outreach director.

“The new initiative with the clergy is a subset of our general outreach efforts,” she said. Supported with a portion of a \$35,000 grant from the Sequoia Healthcare District, she hopes to have a part-time employee on board by June to work on the issue. Part of the new person’s job will be to set up programs in churches on advanced directives for health care.

“We’ve found meetings about advanced directives to be less threatening than those about death and dying, and we can still use them as an entree to talk about hospice,” said the Rev. Marlyn Bussey, member of Mission Hospice’s board of directors and pastor at St. James AME Zion Church

in San Mateo. She said the emphasis on African-American and Hispanic congregations is because, statistically, these populations have had the least growth in using hospice.

Noting that death and dying aren’t popular topics with most people, she pointed out that African-Americans and Hispanics have often been leery of health care agencies. Incidents such as the infamous Tuskegee experiments, where African-American men were abused as medical test subjects, have led to distrust.



Rev. Marlyn Bussey

“Churches are often places where people can receive information without fear,” said Bussey. “In the African-American community, the pastor is the go-to person in a crisis. We want to make sure local pastors understand that it’s not hospice’s job to supplant another pastor, but to support them.” 🐾

Calendar of Events

SOUL STROLL FOR HEALTH WALK

Saturday, May 21, 10 a.m. at Coyote Point Park. Come walk the one-, three- or five-mile courses along the beautiful bay front path. For more information, visit the African American Community Health Advisory Committee's website at www.aachac.org

NEW VOLUNTEER INFORMATIONAL MEETINGS

Tuesday, Sept. 20, 12 to 1 p.m. and 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. at 1670 South Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300, San Mateo.

NEW VOLUNTEER TRAINING SESSIONS

Saturdays from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m., March 5, 12, 19 and 26; and two Thursdays from 6 to 8 p.m., March 17 and 24. 1670 South Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300, San Mateo.

FALL GALA: JEWELS & JEANS

Saturday, Oct. 15, 6 p.m. Mark your calendars now, and get ready to dance the night away at the Mission Hospice Auxiliary's fabulous fall gala "Jewels & Jeans." The fun-filled evening will include dinner, line dancing, silent and live auctions, and a wild west casino, at the Hyatt Hotel in Burlingame.

BEREAVEMENT SUPPORT GROUPS

Mondays from 6 to 7:30 p.m., and Wednesdays from 6 to 8 p.m. at 1670 South Amphlett Blvd., Suite 300, San Mateo. Open to all members of the community on a drop-in basis. For more information, please call (650) 554-1000.



From the CEO's Desk

As I enter my fourth year with Mission Hospice & Home Care, I look back on how much we have grown as an organization since 2008. Our average daily patient count is now regularly over 60, not to mention our 13 home care patients. The quality of care we provide remains excellent, and we are excited to explore the possibility of opening a residential hospice facility in San Mateo County.

We have been blessed with extraordinary support from our board of directors and the community at large. Our strong outreach program, with its special focus on faith communities, has directly increased the diversity of our board, patient, volunteer and staff populations. I'd like to thank everyone who has contributed to our success as an organization. With your continued support, I'm optimistic that we will navigate successfully the healthcare changes and challenges we anticipate in the years ahead.

I'd like to thank the Peninsula Italian American Social Club, President Emil and Lois Giannoni, and the planning committee – Stefano and Elena Quilici, Pat and Mavis Dianda, Vice President Angelo and Angie Fanucchi, Pietro and Marcella Quilici, John and Roberta Bernat, Paolo and Grace Quilici, and Mauro Quilici – for a very successful dinner and dance on April 15th. The evening was a huge hit, and we were able to raise more than \$30,000 to support patients who cannot afford hospice care.



Peninsula Italian American Social Club President Emil Giannoni, with his wife Lois

I'd also like to thank the Sequoia Healthcare District, who recently awarded the agency \$35,000 to support our Transitions program, which provides free case management and volunteer support to people who are not yet ready for hospice care.

Finally, I'd like to welcome the new volunteer graduates, who join more than 90 individuals visiting patients and their families, providing invaluable comfort and support. Their presence makes a significant difference in the lives of those we serve. 🐾



Peninsula Italian American Social Club dinner



Third Annual Night of Fun planning committee members Elena Quilici, Mavis Dianda, Pat Dianda and Stefano Quilici

Staff Profile: Nenita Lindo-Gonzalez

In her role as Director of Finance at Mission Hospice & Home Care, Nenita Lindo-Gonzalez oversees the organization's financial activities and preserves its financial health, helping to ensure that the organization can provide the very best care to patients for many years to come.

Lindo-Gonzalez is one of several office staff who serve behind the scenes to keep things running smoothly and provide the direct-care teams of nurses, social workers and home health aides the tools they need to do their jobs well.

"I love working with the people at Mission Hospice because I know how much they care. It's a blessing to be here to support them," she said.

Her job also involves managing the financial reporting and supervising Medicare billing, which used to be handled by two people. New computer systems helped make it a one-person job, but also added complications.

"Because of electronic media, Medicare is constantly upgrading, so there are always new things we have to do," she explained. "I used to only focus on financial management, but now I'm also helping design our clinical databases. I can help ease the pain of working with the new software for the medical staff."

The opportunity to implement new systems and gain new experience to complement her accounting expertise is part of what drew her back to Mission Hospice after three years at Samaritan House, a community service agency in San Mateo. Lindo-Gonzalez is one of several employees

who has returned to Mission Hospice in the past few years – a testament to the growth and renewed strength of the organization. She worked briefly at Mission Hospice in 2005.

She immigrated to the United States from the Philippines 10 years ago with her children, who are now 19, 20 and 28. She was a certified public accountant there for more than 20 years, mostly with corporations and banks. Her first job in the U.S. was with Family & Children's Services in Palo Alto, which also served as her introduction to American-style nonprofit agencies.

"At the time, I was so amazed that an organization could exist on public donations," she recalled, adding that she feels the responsibility of being accountable to donors and other funders.

"Mission Hospice delivers a vital service to the community, and our donors have been very generous in their support," she said. "It's one of my duties to see that our money is managed well, so that we can continue to provide compassionate end-of-life care to the people who need it." 🐾



Nenita Lindo-Gonzalez

Spiritual Care Helps Patients, Families Through Tough Times *Continued from page 1*

Feeling Safe

Siddall said the point is not to proselytize or impose any belief system, but to provide an environment where patients and families can "feel safe and be who they are."

Jennifer Millen, whose father, James Witt, died in March, 2010, said that was exactly what happened in her family.

"My father wasn't a religious person; he was pretty much agnostic," she said. "But toward the end, he was frightened. Linda and he had a rapport, and he felt safe enough to talk about certain things with her. He always questioned whether there was a higher power. She really helped guide him to believe there was somewhere for him to go in death."

Millen said the family as a group also felt supported as they gathered during her father's final coma.

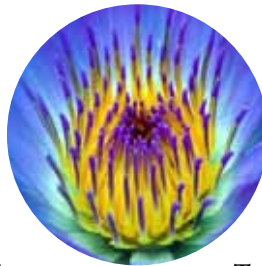
"We talked about Dad a lot and about his background. Linda alleviated that fear of the unknown for us. She eased our minds that he was safe."

Listening

Wheless said the essence of spiritual support is listening.

"I listen with an emphasis toward what the patient or family member needs spiritually," she said. "Not everyone has a spiritual need. People can find spirituality in so many things, which may or may not include religion."

A pastor in the Metropolitan Community Church who also works as a chaplain in the Veterans Administration Hospital in Martinez, Wheless chose chaplaincy over parish work because she prefers one-on-one interactions to congregational care.



"When a person is dying, there can be a lot of questions about what will happen to them and their families afterward," she said. "We're there to help with those fears. I try to approach that by giving them as much information as possible so they'll have less to fear. Sometimes, folks find their own answers, while others need a little help."

Training

Frank DeMartini, a care volunteer for 2½ years, helps Siddall lead a Spirituality & Grief Support Group at the church they both attend, but refers hospice patients with spiritual issues to Siddall and other trained staff.

"When patients start to ask questions about spirituality, it's not our responsibility to get involved in what they're thinking or their belief systems," he said. "If we observe a spiritual issue in a family that needs support, we put it in our visit report so Linda can follow up. Our training tells us what we can and can't do; trying to do more is a disservice to the patient."

Continued on page 4

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Spiritual Care Helps Patients, Families Through Tough Times *Continued from page 3*

Jeanne Weir, a chaplain at UCSF Medical Center who also is a Mission Hospice volunteer, said her hospice training has informed her chaplaincy work at the hospital, making it easier for her to approach patients about difficult issues. However, while she may see a hospital patient once or twice, she often works with a hospice patient for months.

“At Mission Hospice, we’re there as part of the team to provide emotional support,” she said. “I ask people what makes them happy, what brings them peace or joy. I had one patient at hospice who didn’t want to talk about anything religious. What she liked was conversation, and she was very civic-minded, so that’s what we discussed.”

She also credits the volunteers’ Thursday night educational meetings with providing a continuing forum for discussing how “we, as volunteers, can be careful not to impose our personal hopes and meaning on our patients. We learn to listen actively so we can let the patients realize how they have found meaning and hope in their lives and how they are continuing to do this in their new circumstances.”

“When people talk about death and dying, they go to a really vulnerable place in their heart of hearts, and that’s where spirituality lies.” 🐾

New Giving Levels Recognize Major Donors

In recognition of its most generous donors, Mission Hospice & Home Care is introducing the following expanded giving levels:

- Stewards Circle: \$5,000 - \$9,999
- Guardians Circle: \$10,000 - \$19,999
- Lotus Circle: \$20,000+



“Throughout our history, we’ve been very blessed to receive major gifts from individuals and community organizations that support our mission,” said Dwight Wilson, chief executive officer. “As both the number and value of major gifts have increased over the past few years, we wish to acknowledge these significant donors in a special way.”

These expanded giving levels build on the Benefactors Circle, which was reintroduced in 2009 to recognize those donors who give more than \$1,000 annually to Mission Hospice. Last year, more than 120 Benefactors Circle donors supported Mission Hospice’s many patients, programs and services.

Recognition will be given to donors in select publications, such as the annual report, and events, including the annual anniversary celebration, according to Frances Freyberg, development director.

“Thank you to ALL of our donors for your continued support!” she added. 🐾



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