

Rounds with a hospice nurse: Compassion in action

When you're a hospice nurse, each day is different. The schedule, your patients, and their needs vary; the one constant is compassion.

Mission Hospice RN Case Manager Naoko Ishikawa sees each of her 12-16 patients at least once a week, and more often if their symptoms call for it. She shares the details of a recent day in which she visited five patients.



Her morning starts with a call from Donald, whose mom, Grace – one of Naoko's patients – had fainted. Naoko heads straight to Grace's assisted living facility in San Mateo. Donald meets her there, and they review the events with Grace's caregivers. "We work as a team," Naoko says, and the trust between them is obvious.

In her 90s, Grace is in bed, frail but conversant. Naoko squats down to look in her eyes. Grace seems reassured by Naoko's presence, and reports that she feels fine. Naoko takes Grace's blood pressure, which is strong. She's confident that Grace's fainting spell was caused by constipation. Naoko texts Dr. Salpeter to ask about adjusting Grace's medication to address the issue, and immediately gets the go-ahead.

Naoko gives the caregiver the new instructions, notes this in the patient's chart, and checks to see that the supplies she'd ordered last week were delivered.

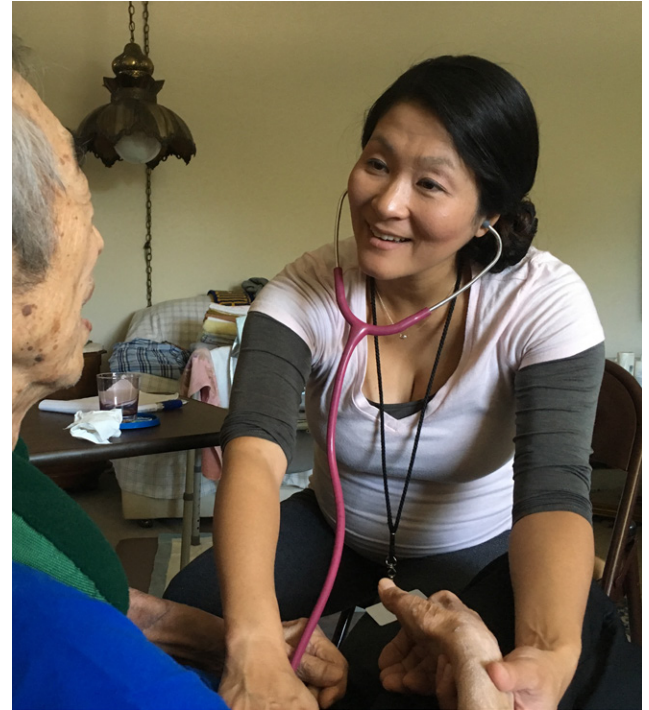
An hour later, after making sure Grace is comfortable, Naoko heads to Redwood City to see her first regularly scheduled patient.

Sharon is thrilled to see Naoko for the second time this week. Almost 90 years old, her husband Herbert has been in hospice care for nine months, and the family has developed a close relationship with their Mission Hospice team. "I'm always relieved when Naoko comes," Sharon says.

Herbert is watching TV in the living room, and Naoko scoots a chair up close to him. "What did you eat this morning?" she asks. "How is your stomach feeling?"

His voice is quiet; he is wheezing, and hard to understand. "Are you dizzy? No? Are you nauseous?"

Naoko is a calm, gentle presence. She takes his vital signs and listens to his stomach. She can tell he needs a suppository to help relieve his constipation – a common



problem at the end of life.

With that taken care of, Naoko checks on his pain. She reminds Sharon how to recognize when he's in pain, and when it would be appropriate to apply a heating pad or give him medicine.

Being a caregiver can be exhausting. As they chat at the kitchen table, Naoko reminds Sharon that she can call any time for support. Naoko assures her she'll be back in a few days. The visit has lasted well over an hour.

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2015 by the numbers

Last year, Mission Hospice cared for **1,368 patients** living with cancer, cardiac and lung disease, and other life-limiting illnesses. These patients ranged in age from 19 to 108, and they lived throughout San Mateo County, northern Santa Clara County, and San Francisco.

Our latest annual report recognizes the donors, volunteers, and staff who made this possible. For a copy, visit www.MissionHospice.org or call us at 650.554.1000.

The gift of kindness

Dwight Wilson, CEO



Those of us who work with people who are approaching the end of their lives – or whose loved ones are – often get asked how we can do this work. I'm fairly confident I speak for all of my colleagues at Mission Hospice when I say that we feel very fortunate.

We are welcomed into people's homes. We are entrusted to help people share their fears, hopes, and dreams. We are allowed to care for them – not only physically but also emotionally, spiritually, and practically. And (as you can see from the stories in this issue) we are allowed to give the greatest gifts of all: kindness and compassion.

Recent events in the world and across the nation have reminded me how much this kindness and compassion is needed. How much each of us needs to be listened to – really heard. And how much a simple touch of the hand can offer comfort. This is the gift we are able to offer every day.

Mission Hospice continues to see more demand for our care, and we have deepened our commitment to our patients and families. I'm pleased to announce that we have appointed RN Mary Santana, who has been with Mission Hospice since 2014, to the new position of Hospice Clinical Director. Her leadership will help us maintain our high-quality, personalized care, and give our Clinical Supervisors time to focus on mentoring and supporting nurses in the field.

In addition, we've welcomed to our staff experts in quality, education, and cardiac care. And we've increased our training for both clinical and administrative staff to ensure that we keep up with the ever-changing healthcare landscape.

Whether you are one of our amazing, dedicated staff members, a member of our Board of Directors or Auxiliary, a Mission Hospice volunteer, a patient or family member, one of our generous donors, or a member of our San Mateo County community, I invite you to extend an extra kindness to someone today. It is so rewarding. – DW

You are invited! **Genovese Night Celebrating Columbus Day**

Saturday, October 8, 2016, 6pm • San Mateo

A dinner-dance benefitting Mission Hospice hosted by the Peninsula Italian American Social Club

For information, visit www.peninsulasocialclub.org/club
Tickets \$60. To RSVP, call Tony at 650.343.7981.

Upcoming events

Writing Through Loss Support Group

Wednesdays, August 17-Oct. 5, 2016 • 6:30-8pm

Mission Hospice & Home Care, 1670 South Amphlett, Suite 300, San Mateo
This free eight-week group helps grieving adults explore how writing can help us express and move through grief. No writing experience necessary. For information and to sign up, call Isabel at 650.532.2338 or email istenzel@MissionHospice.org.

Being Mortal: A film and community discussion

Friday, August 25, 2016 • 6:30pm

Mission Hospice & Home Care, 1670 South Amphlett, Suite 300, San Mateo
If you thought you were dying, what would matter most? Join us for a screening of the PBS film "Being Mortal," followed by a conversation about how to identify and communicate your own wishes. **Free!** Register at MissionHospice.eventbrite.com.

Movie night: The Power of Two **MEET THE AUTHOR!**

Thursday, September 22, 2016 • 6:30pm

Mission Hospice & Home Care, 1670 South Amphlett Blvd, Suite 300, San Mateo
This award-winning film tells the story of identical twins Isabel and Ana Stenzel, their battle with cystic fibrosis, and survival through double lung transplants. Based on their memoir, the story is powerful and inspiring. Isabel, a bereavement counselor for Mission Hospice, will join us for refreshments and a discussion following the 94-minute film. Free tickets at MissionHospice.eventbrite.com.

New Volunteer Informational Meetings

Tuesday, September 27, 2016 • noon-1pm or 5:30-6:30pm

Mission Hospice & Home Care, 1670 South Amphlett, Suite 300, San Mateo
Find out all about volunteering with Mission Hospice and learn about our fall training sessions. **No RSVP needed.** Questions? Contact Craig Schroeder at 650.532.2323 or cschroeder@MissionHospice.org.

Auxiliary Fall Gala: Diamonds and Denim

Saturday, October 1, 2016 • 6pm

The Crowne Plaza, 1221 Chess Drive, Foster City
Join us for our biggest party of the year – the Mission Hospice Auxiliary's annual Fall Gala! Dinner, dancing, and auctions all benefit our Hospice House Campaign. Tickets (\$150) available at www.MissionHospice.org/fallgala or 650.554.1000.

Drop-in Grief Support Groups

Tuesdays from 6-7:30pm, led by Roby Newman, LCSW

Mission Hospice & Home Care, 1670 South Amphlett, Suite 300, San Mateo

1st and 3rd Saturdays, 10-11:30am, led by Tracie Pyers, MSW

Mission Hospice & Home Care, 1670 South Amphlett, Suite 300, San Mateo

2nd and 4th Thursdays, 4-5:30pm, led by Bethany Berkowitz, RN, BSN and Dawn Fitzpatrick, LCSW (from Coastside Adult Day Health)

Coastside Adult Day Health Center, 925 Main Street, Half Moon Bay

En Español: Miércoles en la noche, 6-7:30pm, Dirigido por la Maestra en Trabajo Social Sara Martinez

Redwood City Fair Oaks Community Center, 2600 Middlefield Road, Redwood City

Our free drop-in bereavement support groups are open to the community. For details and to confirm the schedule, visit MissionHospice.org or call 650.554.1000.

For details on all our events, visit www.MissionHospice.org.

Rounds with a hospice nurse ...continued from front

Back in San Mateo, Naoko's next patient, Lillian, is in a 12-bed assisted living facility. The nurse meets with her caregivers to review changes in Lillian's condition, making sure all of their questions are answered. Coordination with facility staff is an essential part of her job.

Almost 101, Lillian is comfortably asleep. Naoko sits quietly next to her, watching her breathe. She feels Lillian's feet to assess her circulation.

Naoko also checks Lillian's supplies. Pads and gloves are running low, so Naoko texts a resupply order that will be delivered tomorrow.

Back in the car, Naoko says she drives an average of about 100 miles a day visiting patients throughout the peninsula. Her radio is tuned to classical music, which helps relax her between visits.

Her next stop is in Burlingame to see Vern, who recently injured his arm in a fall. She adds gauze and tape to her bag before heading into his board and care facility.

Naoko is greeted warmly; she's been working with the staff here for several months. In the office, Naoko pulls out Vern's binder, which contains his plan of care, chart of medicines, and visit notes. She makes a mental note that one of his medicines needs to be refilled.

In Vern's suite, Naoko cleans his wound, letting him know it's healing well. As she works, she asks about his pain and his sleep. Vern's neurodegenerative disease makes him hard to understand, but Naoko makes out his words.

She is kind and gentle, laughing with him. "We build trust with patients over time," she says. "When I spend months caring for patients, I really get to know them and their families."

She tells Vern that she'll be back in a few days for his next dressing change. Back in the

parking lot, she calls the pharmacy for the refill; Dr. Lee has already approved it, and the medication will be delivered the next day.

Her last visit today is to Rita, who lives with her husband Alan in a retirement community. Naoko especially likes seeing

patients in this neighborhood of San Mateo, because the nearby Japanese garden is one of her favorite spots for a break.

First, Naoko confers with the staff at the community, working out how they can all support Rita and Alan – her full-time caregiver.

The couple's lovely condo is filled with orchids, art, and family photos. When Naoko arrives, Rita is

resting in bed; Alan is making sandwiches.

Rita is battling lung cancer and shingles. Oxygen makes it easier for her to breathe, but she's short of breath, and getting around takes some effort. Naoko listens to Rita's lungs, and notices some swelling in her ankles. The nurse reminds her to keep her feet elevated – the goal is to keep Rita ambulatory.

Naoko also recommends that Rita use her shower chair, which will help save her

energy "for something better." Rita smiles and nods – she would like to be able to resume visits with her friends.

Alan and Naoko move to the living room, letting Rita rest. Respectful of the fact that independence is important to the couple, she gently reminds Alan that his Mission Hospice social worker can help him find in-home help when he is ready. This kind of teamwork is part of what Naoko loves about Mission Hospice. "I get a lot of support here," she says.

When she is satisfied that Alan has no more questions, Naoko prepares Rita's medications for the week. Dr. Boblett has already coordinated with the specialist Rita saw yesterday, and Naoko can see the updated medications list on her iPad. She fills Rita's weekly pillbox, and reminds Alan to make sure Rita takes her medications so she can stay ahead of the pain.

Rita's eyes are closed, and Naoko whispers her goodbyes. Back in the Mission Hospice office, she will finish her charting for these patients, check in with her colleagues, and finalize details for tomorrow's visits.

Naoko loves that she can spend the day caring for others (even while seven months pregnant), and considers the time she spends with patients in their home a gift.

"Hospice nursing can be sad – but if I can reduce someone's pain and help provide a good death, that is the most beautiful thing I can do."

It was a beautiful day. 🍌



We welcome to the Mission Hospice family our newest volunteers, who completed their training in July. Our next training is this fall – check our website for details. Photo by Curtis Elsbernd.

Mission Hospice & Home Care serves patients and families in the San Mateo County area with quality care and compassionate end-of-life support. Founded in 1979, we are a local, independent nonprofit that has provided more than ten thousand patients and their families with physical, emotional, and spiritual support throughout the journey from a life-threatening diagnosis through death and the process of bereavement. www.MissionHospice.org • 650.554.1000

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INSIDE: Rounds with a hospice nurse: Compassion in action
From the CEO: The gift of kindness
Welcome to our newest volunteers



Keeping vigil: Being present in someone's final hours

There are times in our lives when we don't want to be alone – for many of us, this includes when we are dying. Our vigil program allows us to accompany patients so they are not alone in the last day or two of life. A vigil might allow family members to get some sleep, enjoy a meal, and take a break. For those who don't have loved ones by their side, a vigil can provide the kind of comfort that can only be offered by another human being.

"Our goal is to create a safe, peaceful, supportive environment for our patients," says Volunteer Coordinator Rani Ferreira, who manages the vigil program.

Vigilers offer companionship and presence. They might dim the lights, share quiet music, read, or simply sit and hold the patient's hand. Like all of our care, it's as individual as our patients.

Some vigils are held overnight to allow family members to get some much-needed rest. For patients with no one by their side, vigils might last for several days, with vigil volunteers tagging in for two-hour shifts, offering around-the-clock support. Vigils are wherever our patients are – anywhere from San Mateo to HMB to Millbrae to Palo Alto, in a patient's home or a care facility.

Coordinating a vigil is no small task. When a need arises, Rani puts the word out via email to more than 50 trained vigilers. Once volunteers respond – and they do, even with short notice and middle-of-the-night timeslots – the vigil begins.

Each vigiler interrupts his or her life to bring comfort to a perfect stranger. Some drive 45 minutes to be with someone in need. One

volunteer takes the bus at 11 at night – and home again at 1am. Others volunteer for late-night shifts despite demands of work and their own families.

For a patient whose sister lives across the country and couldn't be with her, Mission Hospice vigilers sat by, read, and prayed with her. And they helped her reach her sister by phone for their last conversation, bringing them both a sense of peace.

Another team vigiled for a 77-year-old woman whose large, loving family felt anxious and unprepared for her death. "The vigilers really helped the family understand what to expect," explains Rani. "And they were so grateful that the vigil volunteers were with their mom, so they could come and go as they needed to."

In Mission House, vigilers accompanied a man with end-stage Alzheimer's. After nearly a dozen volunteers had taken their turns, the last vigiler knew that the patient's wife and son were on their way to the house. When her shift was up, she stayed by his side so that he was not alone, comforting him as he passed away, peacefully, before his family arrived.

This is the kind of care for which Mission Hospice is known, and the community knows what a difference it makes. Elizabeth, an experienced caregiver at Millbrae Board & Care Home, was moved by seeing our vigil teams in action. "I've worked with hospice patients for 14 years," she says. "I've never seen anything like the compassion, presence, and love you all have shown." 🍂