

Celeste Pagan learned to find her own way after son Carter's death

Carter Pagan was a smart, funny, 5'11" 19-year-old when he graduated as part of the Woodside High School class of 2015. But unlike most of his peers, he knew he probably had only months to live.



Former patient Carter Pagan never saw himself as disabled – and lived his life fully.

His mom Celeste said that Carter's death is something they'd thought about his entire life. When he was born prematurely weighing just 1 lb, 7 ounces, doctors said he wasn't going to make it. "He almost died so many times," she says.

With the support of Celeste and the rest of his family, Carter lived life fully – despite cerebral palsy, vision impairment, a seizure disorder, and other life-limiting ailments.

After a bad fall and a series of surgeries, Carter needed a wheelchair to get around. Still, Celeste says, "Carter never saw himself as disabled." With help from his family and an aide, Carter went sailing, ziplining, and canoeing. He followed his passions for sports, music, and religion.

Eventually, the prospect of Carter's death became more real, and hospice care was the best way to make him comfortable. For Celeste, knowing that Carter was in good



Carter's team supported his sisters Kat (left) and Hailey as well as his parents.

hands with his Mission Hospice team was everything. "Our experience with Mission Hospice was just beautiful. It was a support village for our whole family."

Carter and his dad Randy both developed a special relationship with volunteer Paul Smith, who helped Carter come to terms

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From the Outreach Nurse

Talking to families about hospice

By Chris Ritzo, RN, BSN

As nurses and social workers on the clinical outreach team, our primary job is to talk to families about hospice.

We make informational visits to anyone who's interested in learning about hospice care, whether now or in the future. We meet people in their homes, hospital rooms, care facilities – and even coffee shops and offices. We meet with patients, family members, or both. Sometimes adult children will call us on behalf of their parents.

Our goal at all of these visits is to educate and answer questions. We find that many people are unfamiliar with hospice, which

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Outreach Nurse Chris Ritzo (above right) met with the Hutchinson family in their home. Our team members will meet wherever it's convenient for family members; our job is to educate and answer questions – and help them find the care they need.

A season of change and of gratitude

Dr. Robert Roe
Chair, Board of Directors



In the 40 years since Mission Hospice was founded as San Mateo County's first nonprofit hospice program, the organization has been through many changes – first and foremost, to meet the evolving needs of our community, but also to adapt to changes in our country's healthcare system.

What made our first four decades successful is not enough to carry our nonprofit through the next 40 years, with growing for-profit competition, consolidation, and decreased reimbursement for care. In response, our organization has made a number of programmatic and organizational changes this year to help ensure our long-term sustainability.

Some changes, however, are simply part of the process of life – something we witness every day at Mission Hospice. Earlier this month, Lisa Deal, RN, MPH, ScD, made the difficult decision to step down as CEO due to her parents' ongoing health challenges. I want to thank Lisa for her nearly 10 years of service to Mission Hospice, and her passion for protecting the future of nonprofit hospice care.

I'm pleased to introduce Dolores Gomez, RN, MN, as interim CEO. Dolores is well respected in our community, having served in leadership roles for the past 20 years at San Francisco General, Kaiser Permanente, Sutter Mills-Peninsula, Vibra Kentfield Hospital, and University Healthcare Alliance. Dolores has the full support of the board as she leads Mission Hospice during this time of transition.

Throughout these many changes, two things have remained constant – our commitment to our community, and the overwhelming support of our donors and volunteers. It's only because of your generosity that we can provide our neighbors and friends with exceptional end-of-life care above and beyond what Medicare will reimburse.

As we look forward to the Thanksgiving season ahead, I am especially grateful for your continued support. 🍂

Upcoming events

Unless otherwise noted, all events are at Mission Hospice & Home Care, 1670 South Amphlett, Suite 300, San Mateo

Drop-in Grief Support Groups

Regularly in San Mateo and on the Coastside

Our drop-in bereavement support groups are **free** and open to all. For details, check MissionHospice.org or call 650.554.1000.

Reimagine End of Life 2019

October 24 – November 3

We host several events as part of this Bay Area-wide exploration of death and celebration of life through creativity and conversation. Details at letsreimagine.org.



Movies@Mission Hospice: Go In Peace!

Thursday, November 14 • 6:30–8:30pm • Mission Hospice, San Mateo
Tuesday, November 19 • 6:30–8:30pm • 925 Main St., Half Moon Bay

Two screenings of the final film in our 2019 series! This film explores how environment can trigger trauma in a patient – especially veterans – and how caregivers can create a safe environment. Join us for popcorn and a panel discussion. **Free**. Tickets at MissionHospice.eventbrite.com.

Healing Touch Level 1 training

Saturday, November 16 + Sunday, November 17 • 9am–5pm

Healing Touch is a gentle, complementary energy-based approach to health and healing. 16 CEUs available. **\$400**. For information or to register, contact Constance at 650.532.2538 or csweney@MissionHospice.org.

Grief and the Holidays Support Group

Monday evenings, November 18–January 6 • 6–7:30pm

This eight-week group helps grieving people manage the holiday season. **Free**. For details and to register, contact Isabel at 650.931.8236 or istenzel@MissionHospice.org.

Complicated Grief Level 2 Training with Dr. Shear

Friday, November 22 + Saturday, November 23 • 9am–5pm

Dr. Katherine Shear returns for her Level 2 training for professionals and graduate students working with those who are grieving. Level 1 training or equivalent is required. 13 CEUs available. **\$375; students \$300**. Register at MissionHospice.eventbrite.com.

Save the date: 41st anniversary celebration

Sunday, January 26 • 2–5pm

Save the date for our annual celebration of caring for the community. Tickets go on sale in December. For more information, call 650.554.1000.

For details and more events, visit www.MissionHospice.org.

THE MISSION HOSPICE AUXILIARY FALL GALA

Diamonds & Denim



Thank you to our Auxiliary, Fall Gala Co-Chairs Yolanda Crosby and Vibeke Gade, our sponsors, and 300 attendees for a wonderful gala. Together, we raised a record \$300,000+ for our Woodside Hospice House Campaign.

More photos at MissionHospice.org/photo-gallery and on our [Facebook page](#).



Outreach nurse: talking about hospice care ...continued from front

is a specialized kind of palliative care for people nearing the end of their lives.

We always emphasize that entering hospice care is a choice. With a referral from a physician, each patient gets to decide whether to begin hospice care, and also which agency they want to provide that care. While a physician may refer you to a particular hospice provider, you can always ask for a different organization.

One of the common myths we hear is that once someone goes onto hospice care, they are “giving up.” That’s not the case at all – we like to say that hospice helps someone make the most of the time they have left. The wraparound support hospice provides not only helps ease physical symptoms,

but also includes emotional and spiritual support for the whole family.

Because of this comprehensive support, some patients become more stable and even go on to “graduate” from hospice. And if a new advanced treatment becomes available, a patient may opt to leave hospice in order to pursue that treatment. It’s all the patient’s choice.

In addition to explaining hospice care, our outreach team helps families understand and navigate their benefits. Many people don’t realize that Medicare and most private insurance cover hospice, including related equipment and prescriptions.

Sometimes patients aren’t ready for, or don’t qualify for, hospice. We can refer those



Our outreach and intake team members – like Nancy Cavallero, LVN, above left – answer questions and help people plan for their care.

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patients to one of our partner physicians who specialize in palliative care, and who even make house calls. Our team can add the support of social workers and volunteers through our Transitions program.

Recently, I got a call from a woman who said, “I’m not sick, but I’m old. I want to get my ducks in a row.” I’ve been helping her complete her advance health care directive and learn about hospice care for when she’s ready.

We love it when patients plan ahead. It’s a lot easier to consider your options before you need them, than to make decisions under pressure when you’re acutely ill. Dying is a normal part of life, and our role in clinical outreach is to help you prepare. 🙋



Meet Outreach Nurse Bethany Berkowitz, RN, BSN

Joined Mission Hospice: 2014

Grew up: Moss Beach, CA

What led me to Mission Hospice:

I started as a volunteer at Mission Hospice while I was attending nursing school, in order to learn more about end-of-life care. The way the hospice benefit allows us to address all the needs – not only medical needs – of our patients is an inspirational way to practice nursing, and something I wanted to be a part of.

Passions: I am passionate about my family. I enjoy spending time in nature and singing, and I love to dance (salsa, swing, Middle Eastern, and ballroom).

Desert island album: Graceland by Paul Simon is my favorite album, but Billie Holiday is my favorite artist.

Favorite food: I love all different cuisines, but if I had to choose one, it would be Mexican food.

More about me: I did a lot of traveling when I was younger; I spent three months in Southeast Asia on a religious studies course during college. After graduation, I spent five months traveling in South America, where I volunteered at an animal refuge for wild jungle cats in Bolivia, and also visited Peru, Chile, Argentina, and Colombia.

On my bucket list: I’d like to see the northern lights.

Mission Hospice & Home Care serves patients and families in the San Mateo and Santa Clara County area with quality, compassionate end-of-life care and education. Founded in 1979, our local, independent nonprofit has supported thousands of patients and their families through illness and bereavement. Donations from the community support our exceptional care and educational programs, and help us serve people regardless of their medical coverage or ability to pay.

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INSIDE: Mom learns to find her way after her son's death
From our Board Chair: A season of change and gratitude
Photos from our Fall Gala!



Pagan family ...continued from front

with his mortality. Social Worker Sonia Estival provided regular support for Celeste, often over coffee. Bereavement Coordinator Isabel Stenzel supported Carter's younger sister Hailey, who Celeste says "was Carter's arms, legs, and eyes."

In November 2015, Carter died at home, after a quiet morning with Hailey and their older sister Kat. His passing brought a huge shift for the family, especially Celeste, who had fought for Carter for so many years.

Celeste wasn't interested in going to a bereavement support group, but her husband Randy was – so they went together. "It was wonderful to find so many people who have lost someone – you feel an instant connection."

Isabel adds, "The Pagan family came consistently to our drop-in support groups, and demonstrated that sharing grief is how we heal. They are finding their way through a devastating loss."

Celeste's high-energy, all-in approach to life – including her commitment to processing her grief – is so inspirational, she was an invited speaker at Mission Hospice's annual memorial service in June, where she shared Carter's story.

Carter is still ever-present: in the hearts and minds of his family, his former teachers and schoolmates, and in the photos and poems Celeste carries with her. "I feel like Carter makes me who I am today. He makes me carry on."

"There was a point when I felt like it wasn't ok to be happy.



The Pagan family (from left) Hailey, Randy, Kat, Celeste, and Carter, celebrating Kat's wedding.

Now I feel like I can be happy. Carter would want me to be happy. It's ok to be ok. I'm laughing again."

"Mission Hospice gave me a lot of tools that I could use. What I learned from Mission Hospice is how to find my own way." 🍂