

## Fulfilling her dream: Sue Kensill, Clinical Nurse Manager

Nursing is something Sue Kensill dreamed about from the minute she graduated from San Jose State with a degree in art and a minor in psychology. It took many years for that dream to

come true. After working as a massage therapist for 25 years, she returned to school to earn her RN from De Anza College. As part of her training, she shadowed a hospice nurse for a day.

"I didn't know anything about hospice," she says. "But I remember listening to Dr. Macchello (now an associate Medical Director with Mission Hospice) discuss a patient with a hospice nurse - they had such a heartfelt approach to caring for the person. That was when I thought, 'This is exactly what I want to do.'"

Just before she graduated, Sue did a preceptorship with Mission Hospice, and thought it was a great fit for her. The feeling was mutual, and she joined our team on a full-time basis in early 2016. "I love spending time with patients in their homes," Sue says. "The connection is beyond fulfilling."

After working directly with patients as a Nurse Case Manager for several years, Sue was promoted to Clinical Nurse Manager. Her focus now is supporting our nurses in whatever



*Sue (far right) enjoying time with her nephew's children and her partner Beth.*

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## Compassion and connection during the pandemic

Across the globe, COVID-19 has disrupted lives and challenged us to adapt to difficult circumstances. While so much has changed, one thing that's remained constant is our commitment to providing compassionate end-of-life care and education for our community.

Our team has quickly shifted to respond to the evolving needs of patients in the San Mateo and Santa Clara County area, including those suffering from COVID-19. With precautions, our staff is providing critical care that enables seriously ill patients to remain in the safety and comfort of their own homes.

Mission Hospice volunteers have swapped their in-person visits to letter writing, phone calls, grocery shopping, and other creative ways of supporting families.

### *Finding new ways to connect and support each other*

Our wide range of community education programs are now online, providing opportunities to learn and talk about how to live and die well. From our popular author and movie series to presentations from nationally recognized

experts in resiliency, grief, and advance care planning, these virtual programs have become a resource for people around the world.

The pandemic has more people thinking and talking about advance care planning. We have moved our free *Take Charge* series



*...continued on back*

# High school student Emily Kim balances volunteering and studies

By Francesca D'Urzo, Carlmont High School



Volunteer Emily Kim, pre-COVID, spends time bedside with a patient at Mission House. Photo by Francesco D'Urzo.

Emily Kim, a junior at Carlmont High in Belmont, has volunteered at Mission House for over a year.

"I discovered the opportunity to work at hospices during my sophomore year. Deciding to apply for a volunteer position definitely shaped my passion for medical care and has positively changed my perspective on the concepts of life and death," Emily says.

*"Getting the opportunity to work hand in hand with some of the most highly trained nurses and health specialists in the area has been invaluable."*

- Volunteer Emily Kim

"Being the youngest and only high school volunteer was definitely a challenge at first," Emily says, "but getting the opportunity to work hand in hand with some of the most highly trained nurses and health specialists in the area has been invaluable."

As a volunteer, Emily helps the nurses at the hospice house with patient care, including feeding patients and keeping them company.

"What I adore about the Mission Hospice program and staff is that they treat every patient with respect and preserve their humanity," Emily says.

Laura Paniagua, a Mission Hospice nurse, says, "I have been working alongside Emily for a majority of her time as a volunteer, and I am beyond impressed with her dedication to the work. Seeing the way she treats our patients with

such gentle love and care at such a young age gives me hope for the future."

Mission Hospice Chief Medical Officer Dr. Gary Pasternak says, "Our job as a hospice staff is to provide patients with the opportunity to fulfill their own meaning in life, as well as to celebrate their humanity. And to see a junior in high school already spreading awareness and embodying this message is truly inspiring to me."

*"Volunteering with Mission Hospice....has truly taught me to cherish the little moments in life."*

- Volunteer Emily Kim

Emily says that Mission Hospice gave her a new outlook on life. "Coming in to volunteer every weekend and seeing all of the families interacting with their loved ones in the hospice home has made me appreciate my life so much more," Emily says. "Being able to put a smile on a patient's face is the most warm and rewarding feeling I have ever felt."



Taking a break, Emily (left) enjoys chatting with nurse Laura Paniagua in the backyard at Mission House. Photo by Francesco D'Urzo.

"Volunteering with Mission Hospice is definitely what I look forward to most at the end of every week. My dream is that I will hopefully attend a college close-by so I can stop by to help whenever I can because the staff and some of the patients have become a second family to me," Emily says. "This program has truly taught me to cherish the little moments in life." 🐾

*This article is excerpted from the original, which was published in the March 2020 issue of The Scot Scoop, the student newspaper for Carlmont High in Belmont.*

## Sue Kensill, Clinical Nurse Manager... *continued from front*

way they need. "Sometimes my job is teaching, sometimes it's following up with the staff at facilities, coordinating team meetings, or helping them problem-solve. Often, it's just listening to them."

Helping nurses create connections with families is a critical part of Sue's role. "It's important to learn to walk into a room, get a feel for the needs of the patient and family, and then quickly develop a relationship," she says. "Staying focused on the patient and family is the most important thing. Everything else comes from that."

Sue's job also includes working with the rest of the team when a new patient is admitted - coordinating supplies, equipment, and paperwork, and assigning a nurse. "I try to keep the workload balanced among our team," Sue explains, "and try to keep nurses in the same geographic region. Some patients request a nurse who can speak a specific language, which we accommodate whenever we can."

Sue says that it's important for her to care for at least one patient herself, both to stay connected to the work



*Nurse Sue Kensill enjoying a visit last year with one of her patients.*

and so that she can better understand what her nurses are experiencing.

Sue admits that the work of a hospice nurse can be unrelenting and stressful, and she savors her down time. She and her partner have started a vegetable garden at their home in San Jose, and she loves to exercise - usually hiking or walking. She also confesses to enjoying the escapism of silly Snapchat videos. But her favorite thing is her family, both human and feline. She is particularly close to her nephew's four kids, now ages 14-21. "They are the loves of my life," Sue says.

Of course, safety considerations during the pandemic have changed the ways in which all of us interact, and this includes our care teams. The majority of Mission Hospice visits are now over video or phone, and Sue mourns the loss of in-person connection for the nurses, patients, and families.

"To not be able to hold someone's hand - either a new patient or someone with whom you've established a relationship - it's heartbreaking for the nurses. The reason people do this work is to be present with the patient." But they are learning to connect in new ways, and - as always - Sue and the rest of the team is supporting them.

"I am always impressed by the heart and the generosity of everybody at Mission Hospice. So much work takes place behind the scenes, allowing our care team to be out there supporting patients and families. I'm so proud to be part of this organization." 🐾



## Thank you!

The entire Mission Hospice family is grateful for the many ways our community has come together to support our team, our patients, and their families during the coronavirus pandemic.

Among the many acts of generosity we've received are the gowns Lauren Grant is sewing for our team, and notes for our patients, written by Girl Scout troop 62575 of San Mateo. **On behalf of the entire Mission Hospice family - thank you all.**



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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:** Meet Clinical Nurse Manager Sue Kensill  
Thank you to our community  
Emily Kim balances volunteering and study



**Compassion and connection during the pandemic...** *continued from front*

online, where we can help people plan for their future care based on what matters most to them. Our *Take Charge Toolkit* and other advance care planning resources remain free and available to all on our website.

Many people, even those who haven't lost a loved one, are experiencing grief at this time. Our grief support groups and workshops have moved online, where we are reaching more people than ever. Mission Hospice bereavement social workers are also supporting our community through this period with individual grief counseling by phone and video.

***Founded by - and supported by - our community***

In the 41 years since our founding, compassionate care has always been a hallmark of Mission Hospice - helping patients live life to the fullest, and providing a level of care above and beyond what most insurance reimburses.

As we navigate into the future together, we are so grateful to our donors for their ongoing support, which is more important now than ever before.

**We are all in this together, and we are here for you.** 📍



**SAVE THE DATE!**  
MISSION HOSPICE AUXILIARY  
**Virtual Fall Gala**  
**Saturday, October 10, 2020**  
For information about sponsoring or volunteering,  
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