

Volunteer Mukund Acharya forges an encore career in service

After four decades in aerospace, Mission Hospice volunteer Mukund Acharya is on what he calls his “encore career” – one that is particularly personal. A former professor, scientist, researcher, and scholar working in government labs, academia, and industry, Mukund found a new path after caring for his wife Sandhya in her final years.

The two met as teenagers in Bombay and married in 1974 after Mukund had moved to the Bay Area for graduate school. Early in their marriage, they returned to India to help Mukund’s mother care for his dad in his final years of life. After Mukund’s dad passed, the globe-hopping family (now with a young son) followed Mukund’s career to Switzerland, Chicago, and Arizona

before finally returning to the Bay Area. Mukund says their lives changed in 2010 when a mammogram revealed Sandhya had an aggressive form of breast cancer. Radiation and chemotherapy treatment followed, and Mukund eventually became Sandhya’s primary caregiver.

“She was an amazing person,” he remembers. “She had a quiet strength and incredible grace. Her constant thoughts when she was ill were about others, especially family.”

He said this caregiving experience was eye-opening. “We learned together to navigate the chaos and complexity of the medical system. I learned how to provide care and comfort. Our journey

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The experience of caring for his wife Sandhya in her final years inspired Mukund Acharya to dedicate his life to community service.

Anniversary celebration to honor Dr. Robert Roe with 2024 Lotus Award



Former Board Chair Robert Roe (here with Auxiliary President Vibeke Gade) will receive the Lotus Award in February.

Each year, Mission Hospice presents the Lotus Award to an individual who has shown outstanding support of the organization. At February’s anniversary celebration, that honor will go to Robert (Bob) Roe of Palo Alto, who has served as a volunteer board member for Mission Hospice since 2014. He is known for his dedication to nonprofit care, his generosity and willingness to do whatever needs doing, and his quiet, calm leadership style.

After a successful career as a physician and leader in the pharmaceutical / biotechnology industry and what he calls his “second or third retirement,” Bob was looking for a way to give back. As it turns out, his friend Bob Sawyer was just about to step down from the Mission Hospice board of directors, and he asked Dr. Roe whether he might be interested in joining the board.

Bob’s experiences both as a physician and as a son led him to say yes. “One of my parents was in hospice and one wasn’t,” he says, “and I could see the different outcomes there.”

“The decision to join the Mission Hospice board was one of the best decisions of my life. It’s really an extraordinary group of

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Meet Outreach Nurse Christine Ritzo, RN, BSN

Grew up: San Mateo

Joined Mission Hospice: 2013

What led me to Mission Hospice:

After working as a Home Health case manager for 25 years, I wanted to do something different. Mission Hospice presented an opportunity to get back to one-on-one interaction with patients, their families, our local physicians, and the support services community. It's been a joy to be supporting a client from the start.

Reading: I am just finishing *Carnegie's Maid*, by Marie Benedict. I also like Dickens and Jane Austen.

Favorite movies: *Field of Dreams*, *Sandlot*, *Rudy*, *Hoosiers*, and – once a year – *The Sound of Music*.

On my bucket list: More travel – more of Europe, Canada, and maybe Australia / New Zealand.

More about me: I appreciate having the opportunity to talk with community members about their goals of care for the future – most often for preparation for the final stages of life. Everyone has a different vision and there is a level of support out there to meet each pathway. Helping them make connections that work for each individual is rewarding to me.

Mukund's new career... continued from front

together the last several years was extremely personal – it left a real mark on my life and the way I thought about things.”

Just after they celebrated their 39th wedding anniversary and years of remission, they learned that Sandhya's cancer had not only returned, but metastasized. She



Sandhya and Mukund in 2006.

entered hospice care and Mukund cared for her until her final breath in July 2014. “We had a wonderful life,” he says.

After Sandhya's death, Mukund says he did “a lot of soul searching,” and decided he wanted to find a way “to give back meaningfully based on my experience.”

This second career has been just as ambitious as his first. Mukund volunteers once a week at Stanford Hospital, working alongside their chaplains to provide care and comfort to people of Hindu and Sikh faiths. He is a member of the Founding Patient-Family Advisory Council, which helps Stanford evaluate care from patients' perspectives. He's a certified

balance coach and writes a monthly health/wellbeing article for the award-winning publication *India Currents*.

As if this weren't enough, he cofounded Sukham, a nonprofit that promotes healthy aging, living well, and preparing for life's transitions, particularly focused on the Bay Area's South Asian community.

Perhaps the most personal of Mukund's good deeds is the organization he founded as a legacy for his wife. Sandhya's Touch focuses on quality of life for those dealing with chronic or serious illness. The organization provides small grants for projects and events that support these patients and their care, including bereavement support projects at Mission Hospice.

On top of all of this, Mukund is an active volunteer with Mission Hospice. One of our first Community Ambassadors, Mukund (along with fellow



Mukund and his family celebrating Sandhya's birthday last September.



Mission Hospice Auxiliary *Fall Gala*

We went back to the 60s for our groovy Fall Gala, where our guests had a blast raising funds to support care for our community. Thanks to our Auxiliary volunteers, sponsors, and attendees, the October 14 event raised more than \$210,000 to benefit our patients and programs.

You can find more photos at Facebook.com/missionhospice.



volunteer Kate Jamentz) helped develop workshops to lead people through the thinking and conversations to support their advance care planning, based on the Take Charge Toolkit created by Mission Hospice and a coalition of local organizations in 2017.

In 2021, he was invited to serve on the Mission Hospice Board of Directors. He is enthusiastic about his work with Mission Hospice, with a great appreciation for the team's shared experience, effort, and dedication to "doing the best they can for the patient and family."

He is passionate about his second career, yet finds time to walk and hike regularly, read voraciously, and enjoy his three grandchildren who live nearby.

"I'm trying to enjoy life the best way I can," he says, "while giving back." 🍌

Reaching more people with community-based care

We are excited to announce that we are merging with By the Bay Health and Hope Hospice to become the largest independent not-for-profit hospice network in Northern California. Our three organizations share a rich history of service to patients and families throughout the San Francisco Bay Area, and are among the longest-standing not-for-profit hospices in California.

Like Mission Hospice, By the Bay Health and Hope Hospice provide a continuum of care for those in the final years of life, as well as a wide range of free community education and bereavement programs. Our new organization will be uniquely positioned to provide compassionate care and impactful community services to more patients and families throughout the region. Together, we expect to serve more than 1,100 patients per day, supported by more than 500 volunteers and 600 multidisciplinary staff, including physicians, nurses, social workers, spiritual support and bereavement counselors, home health aides, and therapists.

We look forward to sharing more information in the coming months. In the meantime, please know that this announcement does not impact our current services, and Mission Hospice remains committed to providing the highest quality, compassionate end-of-life care to our community, which has supported us for nearly 45 years.

For more information, visit MissionHospice.org/BTBH.

MISSION HOSPICE & HOME CARE

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Winter 2024
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Mission Hospice & Home Care serves patients and families in the San Francisco Peninsula and South Bay with personalized, 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: Volunteer Mukund Acharya: an encore career in service Robert Roe, MD to be honored with Lotus Award Photos from the Fall Gala



Bob Roe... continued from front

individuals, both the caregivers and the people who make sure the organization is running stably and efficiently. It's such a remarkable and dedicated group of people."

He served as chair from 2019-2021, during which time Board member Sheila Young says "he steered the organization wisely and capably through periods of both growth and transition. His knowledge and wisdom have been valuable gifts to Mission Hospice."

Bob is particularly committed to nonprofit hospice care, something that is reflected in his efforts to ensure that Mission Hospice can continue in the face of increasing competition from for-profit businesses. His experience across many aspects of healthcare – including strategic development and operations – has been key to guiding our organization through these challenges.

In addition to serving on the board, Bob has recently joined the Mission Hospice Auxiliary, which organizes special events that raise funds and celebrate community to support patient care. He is particularly pleased to be a part of this group,



which for decades was all women, after leading the call to allow men to become Auxiliary members.

Former board member Mary Chigos says, "Bob has done so much to support Mission Hospice over the years. He has given the gifts of time, patience, and support whenever needed. And he's the epitome of a gentleman – with the best smile in the world. He's a helluva guy." 🍷

Please join Mission Hospice & Home Care for our

45TH ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2024

2 – 5PM

Peninsula Golf & Country Club, San Mateo

Hosted bar & hors d'oeuvres

Cocktail attire

Club rules prohibit denim and t-shirts

Tickets \$125

MissionHospice.org/anniversary

Questions? Call 650.554.1000

