

Sharing the caring blog service

Hospice & Palliative Care of Cape Cod sponsors a patient blog service so caregivers can post updates for friends and relatives

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Being the primary caregiver for someone with a terminal illness poses many challenges.

Having to make dozens of daily phone calls to keep family and friends up-to-date shouldn't be one of them, says Hospice & Palliative Care of Cape Cod.

To make communication between loved ones easier, the organization has become an official sponsor of a patient blog service called CarePages.

Caregivers or other appointed friends or family members establish a "CarePage" on which they can post daily updates and photos. Loved ones who have been given the e-mail address and password can check in to see how the person receiving hospice care is doing, as well as send messages of concern and support.

"It's been a godsend," says a Cape woman who lives with her 89-year-old mother, who is dying of a brain tumor. "I don't have to get on the phone and call 27 people. I post one update. Some days I say to myself I don't know how I can keep doing this. Then you get messages of support. It does help to build you up."

Hospice & Palliative Care of Cape Cod is the only Cape health care organization to be an official sponsor of CarePages, one of the largest patient blog services in the United States.

Established in 2000, the Chicago-based CarePages has more than 700 health care affiliates, 10 percent of which are hospice organizations, says CarePages spokeswoman Erin McDaniel.

Caregivers for hospice clients can access CarePages through the hospice Web site, www.hospicecapecod.org. The pages themselves are private and available only to those with the CarePages password, says Melissa Roberts Weidman, spokeswoman for Hospice & Palliative Care of Cape Cod.

"We felt it was a wonderful added resource for families," Weidman says. "People start sending photographs and stories. It becomes an archive of caring for a patient."

"I'm really glad they opened that up to everyone," says Alexandra Grabbe of Wellfleet, who created her own blog when her mother was on hospice care. She started her blog to keep family members up-to-date, she says. "It turned into something much bigger. It really helps you digest the experience."

Although most health care organizations affiliated with patient blog sites, such as CarePages and CaringBridge in Minnesota, are acute-care hospitals, hospices are increasingly signing on, says

Melissa Holm of CaringBridge, where eight hospices are included among 135 official sponsors.

Individuals can create their own free pages through CarePages or CaringBridge, but having the organization that is caring for the loved one sponsor the link makes the process less intimidating, says the Cape woman whose mother is on hospice care. She did not want to be identified.

The officially sponsored sites allow blog readers the option of making donations to the health care organization, McDaniel says. No advertising is allowed on the patient blog sites.

getting started

Interested in creating a patient blog site for a loved one? Go to www.carepages.com or www.caringbridge.org.