

# The A-Team

asera  care Hospice Volunteer Newsletter



An Encouraging Word:

“How beautiful a day can be when kindness touches it”

~George Elliston

## You Did It!



In this issue, we would like to give a special thanks to our vigil volunteers. Over the course of the year, the vigil program has made a significant impact on the quality of care we give our patients when death is imminent. This year, 477 vigil hours have been contributed by a varying group of about 20 vigil volunteers each month. Thank you for your generosity.

**Happy Holidays and Merry Christmas everyone!**

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## Timely Tips and Reminders

**Tip:** Vigil volunteers encourage families to take a break on your visit. Sometimes they need to hear out loud that they have permission to take a rest for themselves. If they want to stay with you on your visit ask them if you can fetch a cup of coffee or water from the kitchen.

**Tip:** If you are having trouble submitting your notes on the HVA please call me right away. If you get a yellow error screen copy and paste the text into an email and send it to me. This will help us resolve problems more quickly.

**Tip:** If you are a volunteer looking for work, let me know if you would like to be on the email list to receive the “Care Options Network Newsletter and Unemployment Opportunities.”

**Reminder:** On- going training classes will be the first Monday of each month.

**Reminder:** Aseracare University courses are a part of mandatory on-going volunteer training. Currently, there are no more additional assigned courses for this year! However, a new schedule will be rolled out for next year.



## The Book Nook

### Recommended Books, CDs, and Media

The holidays can be particularly difficult times for those who have lost a loved one, whether the loss is old or new. This is especially true if the beloved died at holiday time.

Here are some suggested books that are both meaningful and comforting as the Christmas and New Year holidays approach.

***Healing Your Holiday Grief: 100 Practical Tips for Blending Mourning and Celebration During the Holiday Season*** by Alan Wolfelt, Ph.D., Director of the Center for Loss and Life Transition who writes for *Bereavement* magazine. 2005. 128 pages. \$11.95. With care and understanding Wolfelt provides insight into complex holiday emotions and offers ideas for creating new traditions and incorporating healing rituals into the holidays. The set-up of one idea per page offers an easy-to use format.

***How Will I Get Through the Holidays?*** by James Miller. 1996. 64 pages. \$6.95. This short book is highly recommended by Compassion Books. In twelve brief chapters, the author shares encouraging ideas, inspiring quotations, and gracious wisdom for holiday heartache.

***Thoughts for the Holidays: Finding Permission to Grieve*** by Doug Manning. 2001. 24 pages. \$3.00. Doug Manning has served as a minister, counselor, and writer in the areas of grief and elder care. This little gem offers wise thoughts and practical suggestions for coping with the absence of a loved one during the holidays. The price makes it a very affordable gift.

All three books are available at [www.compassionbooks.com](http://www.compassionbooks.com) if you can't find them in local bookstores.

## Helpful Hospice Hints



### HONORING LIFE DURING DEATH: THE GIFT OF VIGIL

#### VIGIL REMINDERS

Vigil volunteers offer a precious gift in accompanying those who are nearing death and, perhaps, even being present at the time of passing. The primary role of the vigil volunteer is to honor the life of the individual by being a sacred presence and to help try to assure that no patient will die alone. Here are some reminders and suggestions on giving the gift of vigil to another soul on this stage of the journey.

1. Prepare yourself by letting go of your own distractions and focusing in the patient. Quiet your soul.
2. Knock on the patient's door, then enter in a calm and respectful manner.
3. When you enter the room, always greet the patient before acknowledging others.
4. Introduce yourself even if the patient is unresponsive and let the patient and others know you have come just to be there with them.
5. Even if the patient is unresponsive, don't speak ABOUT the patient without speaking TO the patient. Remember not to speak about the patient as if he weren't present.
6. Prepare the room. Tidy it if needed; soften the lighting; pull a chair to the bedside; turn on soft music.
7. If they are available, place items of beauty, love or special interest within easy, direct view of the patient. These might be photos of loved ones, flowers, a comforting quilt, or something else that has meaning and provides mental comfort to the patient.
8. Listen for anything the patient might be trying to communicate. Ask questions to clarify so you can offer help or get staff to help.
9. Watch for signs of discomfort or agitation and don't hesitate to notify staff if you feel the patient needs help. Remember it is your role to see that the patient's needs are known.
10. If appropriate, you can read the Bible to the patient or pray with the patient---out loud or even silently.





## VIGIL REMINERS CONTINUED

11. You can provide calm, comforting presence just by holding the patient's hand or placing your hand gently and reassuringly on the patient's arm or forehead, if appropriate.
12. Family questions. One of your roles as vigil volunteer might be to answer questions from family members about what to expect during the dying process. Be careful to ascertain whether the family wants such information or not. Family members might ask you questions about the loved one's discomfort, breathing changes or difficulties, restlessness, pallor or other such matters.
13. If you don't feel comfortable or knowledgeable enough to answer such questions, you can find a staff member to speak with the family. At one vigil, the decline was happening so quickly that a daughter was apprehensive and not prepared. After she talked just briefly to a nurse and the Aseracare volunteer about what to expect and how it was affecting her father, she was able to relax and sit with him and be a comforting presence for his last two hours.
14. The facility or Aseracare might have a brochure or leaflet you can provide for the family to refer to and to share with family members who might arrive later.

MOST IMPORTANTLY---BE ASSURED THAT IT IS YOUR PRESENCE---JUST YOUR CARING AND RESPECTFUL PRESENCE--- THAT OFFERS THE BEAUTIFUL GIFT OF COMFORT TO THE VIGIL PATIENT. WHEN YOU OFFER THAT "SACRED PRESENCE" DURING YOUR VIGIL VISITS, YOU ARE OFFERING WHAT THE PATIENT NEEDS AND VALUES MOST.

Thank you to all on the A-Team who vigil with our patients during such meaningful times. When *your kindness touches* a dying person's days, you make even those last days *beautiful days*. Together, you and your vigil patients share "a glimpse of the divine."



### Insiders' Insights

We're always looking for YOUR input.  
Please let us hear from you.

Can you share a special story or helpful tip?  
Email your contributions so we can share them to [Renee.Gasch@aseracare.com](mailto:Renee.Gasch@aseracare.com)

QUAINT QUIPS AND  
FUNNIES TO BRING A  
SMILE

*A Sign of the Times*

As a little girl climbed onto Santa's lap, Santa asked the usual question. "And what would you like for Christmas?"

The child stared at him, open-mouthed and horrified for a minute. Then she gasped out, "DIDN'T YOU GET MY EMAIL?"



## EDUCATION ASPIRATIONS

Monday January 4<sup>th</sup>, 2010

7pm-8pm

### "Taking Yourself Through the Dying Experience"

Enlarge your ability to have compassion for others. Through a storytelling exercise, you will become a terminal patient and be taken through your own personal dying process.

- What aspects of your life would be the hardest for you to give up?
- How would you cope under the pressure to let go?
- How would your imminent death change the way you live after class?

Your attendance is encouraged as we aspire to build-up ourselves as individuals and as a community. For your enjoyment, immediately following the class will be an additional 30 minutes for volunteers to build friendships and share ideas.

THIS CLASS IS OPEN TO ALL VOLUNTEERS.

ATTENDANCE IS HIGHLY RECOMMENDED.