

The A-Team

asera  care Hospice Volunteer Newsletter



An Encouraging Word:

Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over...it became a butterfly.

Anonymous

You Did It!

The month of May was a great success for the volunteer program, thanks to the dedicated volunteers on the A-Team. Your salaries will all be doubled!

24 active volunteers in May resulted in:

- 87 hours of companion services
- 37 hours of vigil services
- 37 hours of direct services
- 49 hours of travel time
- 1,925 miles driven

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Timely Tips and Reminders

- **Reminder:** If you received a mid-year evaluation in the mail, sign it and return it. This is very important for your file.
- **Reminder:** Everyone received a Medical Device test in the mail. Please complete, sign, and return. This due by the end of June.
- **On-Going Training:**
As Aseracare working towards becoming CHAP certified. This is a very high level and prestigious certification for hospice companies. In order to receive this each agency goes through a very demanding audit. This audit is much more difficult to pass than a state audit.
Working towards CHAP certification means that there will be new standards for the Volunteer program. As a result the necessary Aseracare University courses have changed. Each month, you will receive a course and post test to complete. Answers can be sent back via email. June's course was the Medical Device, and July's course is Infection Control Basics. This month I will send you the test via email in PDF format. When completing the post-test, please email back your answers including the name of the test in the email. Each test is due back the end of the month. If there is anything I can do to make this process easier for you please let me know (such as sending the test hard copy, etc.)

Up- Coming Training Schedule: (all optional for current volunteers)

- Orientation (new volunteers): *July 18th 10-3pm*
- Companion Training: *August 1st 10-4pm*
- Vigil Training: *August 8th 10-3pm*
- Reflections Training: *August 8th 3-5pm*
- Pet Therapy Training: *August 15th 10-12pm*

The Book Nook: Recommended Books, CDs, and Media

- **My Grandfather's Blessings: *Stories of Strength, Refuge, and Belonging***- by Rachel Naomi Remen, M.D. 2001. In this insightful, encouraging book, the author-physician shares stories of cancer patients and others, using her grandfather's wisdom to illustrate how giving to other becomes a blessing to both the giver and the receiver. Each story offers hope, even in the presence of illness and hardship. Remen's earlier book, *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal*, is similarly inspiring.
- **Forever Ours:** Real stories of Immortality and Living from a Forensic Pathologist by Janis Amatuzio. 1980. Dr. Janis Amatuzio is a Minnesota forensic pathologist—a coroner and a scientist. During her decades of dealing with death, she heard so many touching stories from families of loved ones who had died that she eventually came to believe in a life after death that allows for continuing connections with those who have died. The book is her collection of the stories shared by many over her years of practice. A second collection is titled *Beyond Knowing: Mysteries and Messages of Death and Life*.
- **Grieving: A Beginner's Guide** by Jerusha Hull McCormack. 2006. A small book that helps guides those who are dealing with the loss of loved one through the emotions and situations they will encounter and offers hope and support. Nice for passing along to families and friends.
- **Beloved on the Earth: 150 Poems of Grief and Gratitude.** 2009. A lovely, new collection of poems about loss, grief and healing from a local publisher. Includes Minnesota poets and many others.
- All books are available at Amazon.com and other online publishers.

Helpful Hospice Hints

HANDLING QUESTIONS FROM FAMILIES: YOUR ROLE

Your role as a companion or vigil volunteer, whether in a nursing home or a patient's own home, is likely to lead you to interact with your patient's family during a time when family members are stressed, confused, and dealing with many difficult emotions. Family members might turn to you for advice or with questions they have about many of the issues they are dealing with such as medical care, nursing care, equipment for the patient, housekeeping needs, or even family disputes or conflicts. As you come to know family members, you might also, on your own, identify some of these needs. You also might recognize that the patient, spouse, children or others are having a hard time dealing with their own grief over the coming loss of their loved one.

REMEMBER THAT AS A COMPANION OR VIGIL VOLUNTEER YOUR ROLE IS **NOT** TO OFFER ADVICE ON SUCH QUESTIONS. HOWEVER, YOU DO HAVE AN IMPORTANT SERVICE YOU CAN OFFER IN THIS AREA.

WHAT CAN YOU DO?

1. First, you can be sensitive to these kinds of needs. Listen to the concerns and pain that family members express.
2. Be careful not to enter into the dynamic of a family conflict or dispute.
3. You can ask a few appropriate questions to clarify what would most help the family member, such as spiritual care, bereavement counseling, housekeeping, medical information, or family counseling.
4. You can make it part of your "check out" or goodbye at the end of each visit to ask if there is anything the patient or family needs or just something that might help them that AseraCare can help with.

THEN: **REFER REFER REFER**

If the patient or family has identified a need, you can best help by remembering to refer them to the appropriate AseraCare Hospice team member. They can then contact the Spiritual Director or Social Worker or Bereavement Counselor or other team member as needed.

If the family member hasn't identified a specific need but you sense someone might benefit from the services of a team member, you can call the team member to share your insight. You won't be violating the patient's or family's confidentiality in doing so.

Rather, you would be working as part of the AseraCare team to best serve your patient and his family.

TIPS

1. Remember to carry the main telephone number for AseraCare Hospice with you. Family members can always call the main number and ask for the Spiritual Director, Bereavement Coordinator, Social Worker or other assistance they need.
2. You might want to carry a list of AseraCare Hospice team members and numbers with you so you can provide the name and phone contact information for the appropriate team member to the family if you think you have identified which team member can best help.

(A Team List is attached to the end of the Newsletter for your use)

Remember---you are part of the Team and a family under stress might not have the time or energy to ask for what they need. You can help by asking, listening, and REFERRING.

INTERVIEW INSIGHTS:

Get to know Rob Workman

1. Can you tell us a little about yourself, your family and your work?

Well, I'm 38 and in the second act of my life. I moved to Minnesota five years ago from Arizona for a personal change. I worked in media production for 17 years and am now a caretaker.

2. What led you to become a hospice volunteer?

I really wanted to open myself up to connecting with another person, a person that might not be around very long, to really give myself to that person and see what impact I would have on that person and what impact that person would have on me. It was something that really kind of scared me. Most of my relationships, except for the closest ones, were always kept at a remove. I had been interested in Buddhism and compassion practice for some time but never put myself out there to experience it. Even in my other volunteer work there was always a barrier. Most of my volunteering was behind-the-scenes stuff and not directly serving people. My family had had experience with hospice over the years but I didn't really know anything about it.

3. How long have you been a hospice volunteer? Have you done other volunteer work?

I've been a volunteer for just over a year. Prior to becoming a hospice volunteer I did some volunteering at homeless shelters, serving meals, sorting and packaging at 2nd Harvest Food Shelf and packaging meals at Feed My Starving Children. Now my volunteering is exclusively in hospice.

INSIDERS' INSIGHTS:

Featuring YOU...

..but we need your help! Please send your questions, requests, insights, stories, tips, poems and other contributions. Rob Workman's volunteer experience has inspired much of his poetry. Our thanks this month to Rob for sharing one of those touching, vigil-inspired poems with the A Team.

WEEP NOT FOR THE ROSES

BY ROB WORKMAN

Weep not for the roses when they close their petals at night. They awaken to the dawn as a soul to the light.

Weep not for the sky when the clouds are over cast. It radiates eternal, illuminating the present, future, and past.

Weep not for the stars when they fade with the sunrise. They shine beyond the break of heaven, the guardians of prayers and cries.

Weep not for heaven when it feels beyond reach. When ready for the word of God, hear what he has to teach.

Vigil poem for Linda



Interview Insights: *with Rob (Continued)*

4. Did you have any concerns when you first started? If so, how did you handle them?

I suppose my biggest concern was just making the connection with the client. The idea that you're being brought to this person's final resting place and your job is to make them feel better is a daunting one. I'm normally a very quiet person and had been very reticent around new people and here I was supposed to become a friend to someone who wasn't expected to be around very long. I was very nervous. It helped that my first client took to me right away and was quite the talker! It made it a lot easier than I thought it would be.

5. How many patients have you served? What is your average volunteer time each month?

I think I've had an atypical volunteer experience. I've only had two clients in the year I've been doing this. The first client was actually taken off hospice after three months because her condition improved. I like to think I had something to do with that. My current client is 105 years old. Her decline is almost imperceptible and about the only thing you can say about her is that she's 105 years old! She won't be taken off service. We're told in the beginning that clients coming on to service have a prognosis of three to six months of life left to them. I've been with my 105 year old for nine months. My first client is also still living. So I think my experience is not the typical hospice volunteer experience.

6. How would you compare companion service to vigil service? Do you have a preference?

I don't really have a preference. They each have their own special qualities. I love the companion visits because the clients have always been glad to see me and I've been lucky that they both love to talk and have stories to tell. Despite the challenges they've had in their lives they've managed to stay positive and it's a wonderful reminder of how special life is. In a different way, vigil volunteering offers the same message. When you see the body, as an organism, struggling to stay alive despite the soul's readiness to leave it you get a sense of what a wonder life is and what lies within us and beyond us.

7. Have you served as a companion both in facilities and in patient homes? If so, can you explain some of the differences and do you have a preference?

I had one vigil in a person's home. It was kind of a strange experience. It was a nighttime vigil. The husband was sleeping in bed next to his dying wife and I spent the entire time of my vigil in the living room, occasionally looking in on the wife. All my other experiences have been in facilities. I go where the need is.

Interview Insights: *with Rob (Continued)*

8. Do you have any particularly memorable experience you could share?

I'm working with my current companion client on a kind of oral history, recording our conversations that I will try to organize and present to the family on CD. We have fairly wide-ranging conversations. She's fearless about her memories and even about dying. She's very calm and resigned to death, but not in a hopeless or sad way. She's looking forward to it. She wants to go when God is ready for her. She has definite ideas about what that means. She gets a little impatient about it. The days are so long for her. But she has a great attitude towards life, short though it may be for her.

9. In what way has your hospice experience inspired your poetry?

A spiritual element has definitely made its way into my writing. Before my poetry was mostly a diary of my life, reflecting on my feelings and things happening to me. But I've taken to writing poems for my vigil clients and they're expressions of spirit, compassion and love for them. Some are prayers for the ending of their suffering. The fact that I'm able to express these things to these people just goes to show what hospice volunteering has done for me. It has opened my heart, it has shown me the other side of life--the unseen, spiritual light in every person. I see the divine in everyone now.

10. Do you have any suggestions or helpful pointers for other volunteers?

Fear not! If you have even a hint of your capacity to care and you're coming into hospice not knowing if you're capable you'll surprise yourself with how much you can do.

11. What have you gained from being a hospice volunteer?

Two things: a new perspective on life, a deeper spirituality and nearly a new personality. I've gone from a reluctant, reserved shadow figure to an open, friendly and compassionate person. I've also gotten a new career. I dropped out of media production after 17 years to become a caretaker. The shift reflects the shift in my personality. Media is so selfish, self-serving and self-reverential. No matter what you do in that business you're always looking to get ahead, to get someone's attention, to make it about you. But as a caretaker, you give attention. You give yourself. And it's so liberating, and much more fun than anything I've done.