



Volunteer Spotlight

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT OF THE MONTH

Duke HomeCare & Hospice is fortunate to have many great volunteers. Each month we choose a very special volunteer to highlight in the Volunteer Spotlight section. All DHCH volunteers are outstanding ambassadors for our programs, and the reason for our success. Thanks to Martha Brunstein for writing our monthly spotlight features. To read about other volunteers spotlighted in our community, please choose the Volunteer Spotlight Archive link above.

Duke Hospice Profile of Gurlal Singh Baidwan



Some Duke HomeCare & Hospice volunteers begin their journey through life a long distance away from North Carolina. Perhaps none has come as far as Gurlal Singh Baidwan. Gurlal was born in Punjab, India and moved to Durham in 1993 at the age of seven with his parents. The reasons volunteers come to hospice are as varied as the volunteers. What they have in common is a willingness to help in any way they can and the ability to convey a feeling of comfort and compassion whenever they enter a room or a life.

Gurlal Baidwan credits his interest in hospice to the fact that his parents raised him and his younger sister “to embrace and perform selfless service.” He recalls that he first became aware of hospice in a Health Professionals class in high school. The teacher encouraged the class to volunteer in any of the areas of health care that interested them. Gurlal says that he found the concept of hospice “especially fascinating.” He talks about wondering how a doctor could determine whether someone had six months to live and about how one might be influenced by the knowledge of their imminent death. When he heard about hospice he felt “a compulsion that I had not ever experienced before. It was in part an internal force of compassion for the dying and the utter lure of the wisdom that a hospice patient might be able to share with me.”

He contacted Duke Homecare & Hospice and met with Carolyn Colsher, CAVNC, Volunteer Services Supervisor. Because he was not of age to visit patients and their families (patient/family support volunteers must be 18 years of age or older), Carolyn suggested he start by helping with a fund raiser. He accepted that assignment and he also volunteered in

other community organizations.

He graduated from high school and went on to Duke University to major in Cultural Anthropology with a minor in Chemistry and Religion. In 2006 Gurlal again sought out Duke HomeCare & Hospice. This time he was old enough and Carolyn Colsher signed him up for the training course for patient and family support volunteers.

At the age of 21 he now has more than two years' experience working in various capacities with hospice. One of those areas is Camp ReLEAF, a spring weekend event for children who have experienced the loss of a loved one.

William Holloman, Bereavement Counselor for Children and Community with Duke HomeCare & Hospice, refers to Gurlal as a "compassionate presence" to the children at Camp ReLEAF. He says, "...one can observe the importance Gurlal places on human contact and focusing attention on the individual. He has worked with the youngest group of campers for two years. He has a natural ability to connect with children and demonstrates a natural comfort in talking with them. His easy going manner enables him to adapt to a child's spontaneous world of play. He is able to put people at ease through his open acceptance of individuality and uniqueness in others as well as himself."

Gurlal's ability to relate to others isn't limited to children. He also volunteers to visit adult patients in nursing homes and his compassion is as evident with them as with the youngest children. He describes his most memorable moments as "the handshakes, the blessings, the hugs and the kisses on the side of the turban that the patients have given me." He describes a recent patient as "humorous, caring and wise" and hopes that "when it is time for me to leave, I can be as fulfilled with life as he was."

He says he has learned to visit patients simply to spend time with them as a friend and a companion. He finds the relationships very rewarding because he feels he has gained so much more than just wisdom and has given almost nothing in return. He says spending time with patients leaves him feeling "clear and certain about what life can offer in love, compassion and happiness while life itself is not at all certain." He plans to attend Medical School in the near future and go on to specialize in either pediatrics or geriatrics because, in his words, "I've just always been very comfortable around babies, children and the elderly and enjoy being in their presence."

Gurlal Baidwan has proven himself wise and compassionate well beyond his 21 years. He is an asset to Duke HomeCare & Hospice, his parents and his generation. He proves yet again that Duke Hospice volunteers are indeed unique, compassionate, caring individuals.

Written by Martha Brunstein, Duke Hospice Volunteer