
Posted on Wed, Jul. 19, 2006

Hospitals tune in to patient comfort

New Akron City unit caters to seriously ill, the families at bedside

By Cheryl Powell
Beacon Journal medical writer

Years ago, Dr. Skip Radwany kept vigil at his dying father's hospital bedside.

“I remember staying overnight in my father's room in a chair, trying to get comfortable,” he recalled.

Hospitals are becoming more accommodating -- not only to ill or dying patients, but also to their loved ones.

Summa Health System's Akron City Hospital is the latest area hospital to open a unit devoted to improving the quality of life for patients with a life-threatening illness.

Summa's 12-bed Acute Palliative Care Unit features oaklike flooring and furniture, earthy tones, lots of windows, a spa room with a whirlpool tub and sky-scene ceiling lights.

“Part of what we're trying to do is change the culture of providing care in hospitals,” said Radwany, Summa's medical director for palliative care and hospice services.

Summa is holding an open house at the new unit from 4 to 6 p.m. today. It opens Aug. 1.

The goal of the unit is to provide family-friendly care that focuses on meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of patients seeking either palliative or hospice care, Radwany said.

With hospice, or “end of life” care, patients have months to live and agree to end curative treatments, Radwany said. Those receiving palliative care, however, could live for years in some cases and don't necessarily give up curative treatments.

The unit has a 24-hour visitation policy so that family members can stay as long as they want, said John Mastrojohn, director of palliative care and hospice services.

“Our unit of care is not just the patient,” he said. “It's the patient and the family.”

All the sleeper chairs in the patient rooms went through what hospital officials call the “bun test,” with staffers taking turns rating them for comfort.

There are some extra-large patient rooms to accommodate big families, a shower for family members and a kitchenette stocked with sandwiches, soups and other munchies.

Visitors and patients can relax in two “family rooms” -- one that's a quiet space with a waterfall, and another with large windows and a television.

“We've tried to make it look more homelike than institutional,” Mastrojohn said.

Summa used capital funds and donations to pay for the \$2 million unit.

Health care providers are recognizing the importance of providing comfort care along with medical intervention, said Andy Duncan, director of information services for the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization, a nonprofit organization in Alexandria, Va.

“Over the past several years,” Duncan said, “many hospitals have been looking to add palliative care to their services they offer, recognizing there are parts of traditional care that were missing the boat in terms of what the patients needed with regard to pain and symptom management.”

