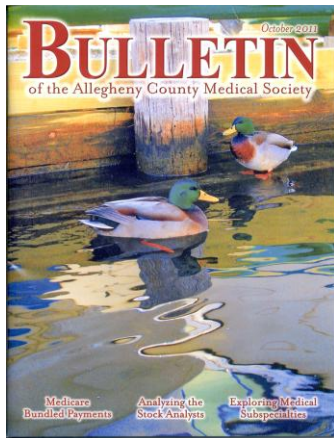


Hospice: Compassion One Patient at a Time

RAFAEL J. SCIULLO, MA, LCSW, MS



Allegheny Co.
Medical
Society
Bulletin
Oct., 2011

Eric's phone rang early Tuesday morning. A case manager at a local hospital asked him to visit a patient named Rose and her husband Tom later that day. The family was interested in hospice care. He quickly made an appointment to see them at 1 p.m. to assess the situation.

Eric is a hospice community liaison. Hospice liaisons work with local health care professionals, patients and families in providing a smooth transition to hospice when a patient is ready to come onto hospice service.

Upon arriving at the hospital, Eric first met with the palliative care nurse, Bev, who explained the situation in detail. Rose had received a lung transplant years ago and subsequently developed lung cancer. Her breathing was labored, and she was rapidly declining—her condition now changing almost hourly.

Eric entered the room, greeted Rose and Tom, and chatted for a few minutes. In the course of the conversation, Tom shared his love for Rose's cooking, revealing that her saltimbocca is one of his favorite dishes.

Tom tapped Rose on the leg and said, "You rest a while, dear. I'm going to talk with this gentleman about taking care of you."

"Okay," Rose said, as a faint smile appeared on her face, "Go ahead."

Eric, Bev and Tom went to the nearby family lounge to discuss Rose's situation. Bev told Tom what he already knew: Rose was actively dying and the inevitable would come within the next few days.

"I understand," Tom said. "You see, Rose just wants to go home. She wants to die at home, and that's my priority; I want to get her home."

"Then that's what we'll do, Tom," Eric responded. "We'll get her home today." They chatted for a few more minutes as Eric gathered more details about Rose's condition and what her needs would be as she transitioned to a home care setting.

This case is an example of hospice at work, respect-
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patients experience relaxation techniques and some of life's simple pleasures, hospice tends to the body, the mind and the soul.

Not all hospice patients are on service for just a few days, as Rose was. With the right kind of pre-planning and meaningful physician-patient discussions, hospice becomes the right choice for those with life-limiting illness. The scope of available hospice services adds to a patient's quality of life. Compassion, comfort and peace of mind are all ingredients in making the most of life. Patients often find that their final few months are spent in meaningful ways with those they love the most.

In fact, a study published in the March 2007 issue of the *Journal of Pain and Symptom Management* reports that hospice care may actually prolong the lives of some patients with life-limiting illness. Among the patient populations studied, the average survival was 29 days longer for hospice patients than for non-hospice patients. In other words, patients who chose hospice care lived about one month longer than similar patients who



Hospice community liaisons work with health care professionals as well as families to provide education about hospice care and ensure patient's wishes are met.

ing the patient's wishes while providing comfort and compassion. Research by the National Hospice Foundation shows that 80 percent of Americans say they wish to die at home. Rose was no different.

Eric began right away to get the wheels in motion for Tom's wife. While Bev printed him a list of Rose's prescription medications, Eric called the hospice intake office to arrange Rose's transportation home and a first "at-home" visit that evening. He went back to see Tom and gave him the news that Rose was coming home. The smile on Tom's face was priceless. "Thank you Eric," he said, his eyes beginning to well up with tears. "This is all she wants."

Rose died a couple days after she got home, with Tom by her side. She was comfortable and pain-free, knowing she was where she belonged. Her journey had not been an easy one, but she knew it was ending in the right place.

While Rose's case is a prime example of the hospice mission, there's so much more. Hospice is a true team-oriented approach to care that involves physicians, nurses, social workers, spiritual care counselors, home health aides, volunteers and bereavement specialists. Hospice takes care of the patient and the family.

Beyond traditional "comfort care," hospice programs are designed to improve a patient's quality of life. Many hospices offer complementary services such as expressive art and music, pet therapy, massage therapy and Reiki (a stress reduction and relaxation technique). By helping

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did not choose hospice care.

Health care providers are encouraged to have the hospice conversation with their patients. Encourage them to think ahead and consider advance care planning. Help patients plan now to take the burden off of loved ones when a trying time arises. November is National Hospice Month, the perfect opportunity to discuss hospice and pre-planning with your patients.

Eric's work to fulfill Rose's wish completes the hospice mission: to provide quality, compassionate care to those with a life limiting illness and their families. This is accomplished by fulfilling patients' wishes, by reassuring their loved ones and by providing dignity, respect and comfort.

It is accomplished every day, one patient at a time.

Rafael J. Sciuolo is president and CEO of Family Hospice and Palliative Care and past chairperson of the National Hospice and Palliative Care Organization. He can be reached at rsciuolo@familyhospice.com or (412) 572-8800. For more information, visit www.familyhospice.com.