

FAMILY *to Family*

COMING TOGETHER
DURING COVID-19

INSIDE:

Heart of Gratitude • Patient Care in a Time of Crisis • Volunteer Spotlight
Support for Yourself and Others • Grief and Bereavement During a Pandemic



Family Hospice
Part of UPMC

Dear Friends,



Thank you for taking the time to explore our fall 2020 edition of "Family to Family." There is no denying that our world is different since we last met here in the spring.

Even though a lot has changed in six months' time, the value and philosophy of hospice care is in

step with our collective response to COVID-19 in many ways. What is most important today, knowing everything could change tomorrow? Who can be the eyes and ears for your physician? Who will companion with you when you feel isolated or alone?

These are circumstances for which Family Hospice, including our benefactors and volunteers, is uniquely prepared.

With heightened use of protective equipment and infection control measures in place, hospice staff have continued to provide expert pain and symptom management, and emotional and spiritual support to our patients and families. We have managed fears, knowing

that connection and trust are vital in applying our expertise to those navigating life-limiting illness.

Our bereavement staff has likewise found ways to be present for grieving family members and caregivers. Although the method of delivery has changed, one-on-one interactions and regular bereavement follow-up carry on virtually in the absence of familiar grieving rituals and services.

And where needs have emerged, our benefactors have stepped in with the resources to meet those needs, from refrigerators for the inpatient unit to community outreach. Hospice is considered essential care, and that has never been truer than now.

In a year defined by uncertainty, thank you for your role in securing quality, compassionate end-of-life care for more than 3,200 individuals and families annually.

Gratefully,

Jennifer Vennare

Vice President, Clinical Operations

HEART OF GRATITUDE

In response to families' desires to thank care team members, the Family Hospice Foundation is pleased to introduce the **Heart of Gratitude**. It is a thoughtful way to express appreciation to someone who delivered special care.

When you make a contribution to the Family Hospice Foundation in honor of an employee or volunteer who went above and beyond, your thoughtful comments will be shared with that individual and he or she will receive a special lapel pin.

Not only do donations provide meaningful recognition, they make a difference for Family Hospice patients and families. Funds raised from the **Heart of Gratitude** help our foundation support programs and services that meet the needs of our patients. To make a donation, please consult with a member of your care team, or access the form on our website under 'Ways to Give.'





BENEFACTORS EASE PANDEMIC'S IMPACT

When faced with adversity, opportunities emerge. Identifying and implementing improvements under dire circumstances, such as this year's COVID-19 health crisis, makes strong leaders, and builds confidence in our communities.

Family Hospice recognizes the evolving needs of its patients and families and is taking action to minimize the impact of the pandemic. Our objectives include offering virtual bereavement support due to the limitations of funeral and religious services, additional resources to provide comfort, and items for patients whose families endured financial hardship.

Since so many families are struggling with grief and unable to have physical contact, Family Hospice offered a free virtual event that discussed managing a loss and celebrating the life of a loved one while maintaining a physical distance.

"The grief process has become more complex with the limitations of bedside visits, end-of-life rituals, funeral services or memorials," Rev. Marlaena Cochran, Family Hospice Spiritual Counselor, said.

"The loss of physical presence, of being alongside and surrounded by our loved ones, has been difficult for everyone."

The program offered resources for support, recommendations for self-care for family members, and coping strategies for healthcare workers experiencing mental and physical fatigue.

Grief support services have also been improved with the purchase of noise-cancellation in-ear headphones for bereavement counselors. Funded by a COVID grant from the Pittsburgh Foundation, this has served to facilitate better communication with family members by improving focus and clarity of sound.

When the pandemic caused the kitchen at the inpatient unit in Lawrenceville to close, a grant from the McElhattan Foundation was used to secure a mini

refrigerator for each patient room, offering easy and safe access to personal snacks and beverages. We are delighted to offer this useful amenity as part of the care experience at the unit.

In order to help lessen the impact of the COVID-19 health crisis, Family Hospice secured assistance from a variety of philanthropic sources. Give Big Pittsburgh, hosted by *Pittsburgh Magazine*, held a citywide "COVID-19 Response" fundraising effort throughout May to help nonprofits in western Pennsylvania. Family Hospice was fortunate to receive donations from Give Big Pittsburgh, as well as generous grants from The Pittsburgh Foundation and the McElhattan Foundation. This kind of support makes an enormous difference as we continue to navigate this unprecedented circumstance together.



Patient Care **IN A TIME OF CRISIS**

Hospice remains an essential part of medical care, especially during a pandemic. Although touch and closeness are inherent to hospice care, current physical distancing requirements supercede that kind of connection. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, hospice providers are now required to increase the use of protective equipment, which can alter, but not eliminate, the intimacy a hospice worker has with a patient.

“Visits by team members are incredibly important right now, especially at skilled nursing facilities, where they have temporarily stopped family visits,” Megan Cameron, Family Hospice social worker, said. “We are often a lifeline to family members who can’t see their loved ones.”

“For some patients and families, seeing nurses in their home is the only contact with others that they have right now,” Kristi Hopfer, Family Hospice RN Case manager, said. “The isolation that patients and families have experienced has been the most challenging part.”

Since the pandemic began, hospice has looked different in many ways. Eliminating personal touch has been one of the biggest challenges for Megan and Kristi. “It has been difficult not being able to hold a patient’s hand or hug a family member,” Megan said. Megan has also encountered challenges linking people with resources where agencies are no longer making home visits for assessments, nor do they have access to a fax or receive mail. “It has definitely extended the time frames for resources. Some things just aren’t available right now.”

Kristi agreed that one of the biggest challenges has been maintaining the closeness that hospice provides patients and families. “I can’t tell you how many times I have had to hold back tears when someone is grieving a loved one and I am unable to hug or touch them,” Kristi said.

Although patients and families are concerned and careful about physical distancing, social work and nurse visits are a lifeline and just as important as ever. “Families were a bit wary at first about having us in their homes when the pandemic began, but everyone has become very receptive over time,” Kristi said. “We have lots of safety measures in place, like hand hygiene and wearing gloves, masks, gowns, and eye protection. I haven’t had any families turn down a visit in their home during this time.”

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the demand for hospice care has not changed. Many people across the country were receiving hospice care prior to the pandemic and

For information on referring a patient or using Family Hospice services for a loved one, please call **1-800-513-2148**.

many more will enter hospice for reasons unrelated to COVID-19. While hospice may look different on the outside, the Family Hospice interdisciplinary team remains committed to continually offering the care for which hospice is known.

“Part of the comfort we provide is just being present, loving, compassionate, and kind,” Megan said. “We can still provide those things; it just looks a little different than it used to.”

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Mary Good is a model volunteer with a huge heart and strong desire to help those in need. She’s dabbled in every aspect of volunteering since beginning her relationship with Family Hospice 13 years ago.

When she began volunteering, Mary assisted with respite care for families. “I always enjoyed this because some of the patients were so talkative and wanted to chat about such interesting things,” Mary said.

Mary is always willing to help Family Hospice in any way. Whether she is making bereavement phone calls, sharing her experience with new volunteers, putting up trees for the annual Holiday Memorial Dove appeal, or weeding and planting flowers in the courtyard garden, she is eager and happy to help. “Wherever there is a need, I am there!” Mary said.

During the COVID-19 outbreak, Mary continued making bereavement phone calls from her home to patients’ families and caregivers. Grief can be a lonely journey, and many are experiencing increased isolation and disruption to their rituals of grief during the pandemic. Mary believes now more than ever in the ministry of compassion and making a connection with our bereaved.

“My favorite part about making these phone calls is how appreciative the family members seem when they receive the call,” Mary said. “They are grateful that someone has taken the time to check in on them!”

How You Can Become a Family Hospice Volunteer

In addition to patient volunteering, there are many other volunteer opportunities available, depending on your interests, talents, and schedule.

Contact the Volunteer Department at **412-572-8829** to learn more and schedule an introductory meeting. We can find the best fit for you. Together, we can support individuals and families in our community who are making the most of life.

REMEMBRANCE

is Personal

Feelings of grief, loss, and helplessness can be overwhelming for those touched by death. Family Hospice understands the magnitude of loss and has expanded its portfolio of memorial items to provide a more personalized remembrance.

In addition to the Celebration of Life Wall, courtyard plaque and silver doves, Family Hospice is now offering tree of life and dove necklaces, a lapel pin, brass desk clock, and walnut keepsake box. All are engravable. Brochures are available if you would like to learn more.

Your contribution will also be helping future patients of Family Hospice. Funds are placed into the Family Hospice Foundation, which meets the needs of patients and families through a multitude of programs and services that would otherwise be unavailable. Over the years, the foundation has offered comfort items to patients and their families, medical treatments uncovered by insurance to ease pain, children's bereavement services, grief groups, and therapy programs.

There are several ways to support the Family Hospice Foundation throughout the end of the year. Current fundraisers include the "Tasteful Tour" and Holiday Memorial Doves. The "Tasteful Tour" provides a "passport" of offers from area wineries, breweries, distilleries, and eateries for \$50. Offers are valid January-June 2021. The passport also includes a commemorative slate coaster and a chance to win a basket of cheer. The Holiday Memorial Doves are ornaments adorning trees at area malls. You can place a loved one's name on the tag of a dove for \$35, or 3 tags for \$100.

More information about any of these opportunities can be found on our website, FamilyHospicePA.org.

Please keep in mind there are new tax laws in place for 2020 that bolster deductions. Contact Christine Jamison, Director of Development, at 412-572-8812 or jamisonc2@upmc.edu to learn more.



You gave our mother everything she needed to keep her life at its highest level of functioning and comfort. Thank you for providing superior care, compassion, and support. — The Lydon Family

GRIEF AND BEREAVEMENT DURING A PANDEMIC

Experiencing grief under normal circumstances is a painful, stressful, and isolating journey. Now that we are living in a time of a worldwide pandemic, grieving a loved one is especially challenging.

Currently, It may not be possible to be with a loved one when they die or mourn a loss in person with friends and family. There is no “correct” way to grieve and no “normal” timetable. Processing the death of a loved one happens gradually but in stressful times, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic, grief and anxiety can be heightened and the ability to recover and heal may be hindered.

During this time of physical distancing, feelings of isolation may intensify and discourage a person who is grieving. “Family Hospice’s bereavement department quickly recognized the impact that physical distancing had in the life of a bereaved person,” Ed Lewis, Family Hospice Volunteer and Bereavement Manager, said. “As freedom of movement became more restricted during the height of the pandemic, bereavement follow-up and support became even more important.”

Bereavement counselors have shifted their one-on-one in-person supportive services to delivery over the phone. The bereavement team has also provided education and communication strategies to clinical staff and community members to use to connect with family members who encounter visitation restrictions at hospitals and other facilities.

“There are challenges to using telehealth, but our team has really risen to meet these challenges and view this as an opportunity to develop deeper connections with individuals who are grieving a death,” Laura Rausch, Family Hospice bereavement counselor, said. “Processing grief can be painful and unpredictable — but it also promotes healing and hope.”

The pandemic can compound the already variable process of experiencing grief. “In addition to grieving a death, a person can be dealing with lost senses of certainty,

safety, and predictability,” Laura said. “It is important for a person who is grieving to give themselves permission to grieve and acknowledge the differing emotions that they are experiencing.”

To cope with isolation and other common grief reactions, Family Hospice bereavement counselors have promoted creative ways of maintaining connection with family members and friends, including the use of technology. “Our virtual supportive services are being received enthusiastically and with appreciation,” Elizabeth Schandelmeier Gilgunn, Family Hospice bereavement counselor, said. “We look forward to the time when we can safely meet in person, but our staff and the community that we serve continue to respect the importance of the safest possible interactions in reducing the spread of COVID-19.”

The Family Hospice bereavement department offers a variety of resources for grieving persons and can connect you with resources in the community to assist with feelings of grief and loss. If you are in need of support during this unprecedented time, please call the Family Hospice bereavement department at 412-572-8829.



Family Hospice
Part of UPMC

Family Hospice
50 Moffett Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15243

NON PROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
PITTSBURGH, PA
Permit No. 02743



This newsletter is published two times annually. Permission must be granted for reprinting of articles that appear here. Please direct questions, comments, and/or requests to **Christine Jamison**, Director of Development, at **412-572-8812** or **jamisonc2@upmc.edu**.

Go Green! If you would prefer to receive your copy of our newsletter via e-mail, sign up from the home page of our website or contact **Helen Stickney**, Development Assistant and Donor Database Manager, at **412-572-8457** or **stickneyhe@upmc.edu**.

FAMHOS516874 CK/TP 9/20

Holiday Doves 2020



Join our long-standing tradition of remembering a loved one with a dove this season. We have a number of ways and levels by which to participate. Learn more at **FamilyHospicePA.org**.

Proceeds benefit patient care, fund programs, and educate the community about the benefits of hospice care.