

FAMILY *to Family*



**COVID-19:
MEETING CHALLENGES
WITH COMPASSION**

INSIDE:

Welcome New Team Physicians • Changes to Clinical Care During COVID-19
Investing in Volunteers • 2020 Event Wrap-Up



Family Hospice
Part of UPMC

Dear Friends,



Thank you for exploring our spring 2021 edition of “Family to Family.” How strange to be marking the anniversary of a pandemic at the same time, yet here we are facing just that, together.

In doing so, we acknowledge that we are transformed by this experience, individually and collectively. This holds true for many aspects of our organization as well, from clinical care to bereavement and volunteer support to fundraising. We continue to adapt with the agility that the patients and families in our care deserve.

We can see that some of these adjustments serve to ease access to services and resources for the better. In the clinical aspect, virtual physician visits have increased with excellent result. The ease and immediacy of engagement has been well met by patients and families and has allowed our hospice physicians to scale their capacity accordingly.

Likewise, bereavement support has found virtual form. Virtual support groups are taking hold and creating meaningful connections. Volunteers are stepping up to help bereaved family members and caregivers navigate the technology that makes this possible.

And speaking of volunteers, we have secured access to online resources related to volunteer training and best practices via the Social Work Hospice and Palliative Care Network. This gives our volunteers, the cornerstone of our organization, access to a full schedule of webinars, enrichment, and networking events.

In every instance, these opportunities are bolstered by the support of benefactors like you. It is how we are expanding our resources to meet the current extraordinary challenges successfully. With your help, it's how we will continue to do so in the future.

Gratefully,
Jennifer Vennare
Vice President, Clinical Operations

WELCOME NEW TEAM PHYSICIANS



Matthew Vasil, DO

Physician Dr. Vasil is board certified in family medicine and has been a UPMC physician at Valley Family Medicine in Natrona Heights, Pa. since 2006. He was drawn to hospice early in his career and founded Heritage Hospice

in 2010, where he served as a medical director until recently. He obtained sub-specialty board status in hospice and palliative medicine in 2012. Known as a strong patient advocate who loves to educate, joining Family Hospice will allow Dr. Vasil to expand his role as part of the academic hospice model.

His passion for the work is clear. Says Dr. Vasil, “Having the opportunity to work with a team that has the same goal of providing dignity and peace at the end of life is a privilege.”



Roger Zioncheck, MD

Dr. Zioncheck is board certified in internal medicine, fellowship trained in geriatrics, and sub-specialty boarded in hospice and palliative medicine. Dr. Zioncheck came to McKeesport, Pa. in 1991 to join a UPMC geriatrics practice before moving to Community Life as the medical director from 1999-2010.

In the last decade, he has dedicated all clinical and administrative responsibilities to providing care in several skilled nursing facilities and hospices. Dr. Zioncheck served as the medical director of Compassionate Care Hospice until recently and remains the medical director at both Kane Regional McKeesport and Glen Hazel Nursing Centers. He is a tireless advocate for the inter-disciplinary team model of healthcare.

Says Dr. Zioncheck, “My commitment to end-of-life care comes from my belief that quality of life is as important on your first day of life as it is on your last. My team and I serve as advocates for patients in setting goals of care that impact that quality.”

CHANGES TO CLINICAL CARE DURING COVID-19

Hospices are facing challenges as we continue to work to provide crucial end-of-life care during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Family Hospice Lawrenceville inpatient unit is committed to ensuring the comfort and safety of the most vulnerable patients – those receiving hospice care.

“Providing care in the Family Hospice inpatient unit has made us all acutely aware of infection prevention and how we protect our more fragile population,” Elena Nosal, Family Hospice director of clinical operations, said. “The care we provide to patients is unchanged, and we have not lessened the intensity in which we manage care,” Erin Bernhardt, Family Hospice clinician, added.

While visitation is limited, some restrictions have been relaxed at the end of life. “Our nurses have had to fill the roles of outstanding caregivers as well as substitute family members,” Dr. Scott Miller, Family Hospice inpatient medical director, said. “The nurses have truly shined throughout the pandemic. Visitation restrictions means they are doing so much more than providing clinical care.”

The inpatient unit had to shut down their central gathering areas because of the COVID-19 pandemic. “We needed to do our job in preventing illness while keeping our limited guests as comfortable as possible,” Erin said. “We ended up putting mini refrigerators in every room because of

this.” The staff at the inpatient unit has been incredibly diligent about maintaining the highest safety protocols to eliminate any risk of COVID-19.

The pandemic is transforming medicine in the long term. “There is an urgent need to accelerate visiting patients virtually,” Dr. Miller said. “Families and patients appreciate the fact that we can interact with them almost instantly.”

When it comes to home visits, the changes in care have been dramatic. Physicians and nurse practitioners are using more virtual visits than anyone else in hospice. “Previously, the biggest problem was with efficiency — physicians and nurse practitioners were in the car too long, driving to get to patients’ homes. Being able to do things virtually changes everything,” Dr. Keith Lagnese, Family Hospice chief medical officer, said. “If a physician was completing three or four home visits before the pandemic, that can nearly double because travel time is eliminated.”

Although there is a learning curve with virtual visits for both the medical team and patients, the positives vastly outweigh the

negatives. “Prior to the pandemic, I had never had any official virtual visits,” Dr. Lagnese said. “I was impressed with how quickly patients and families adjusted to this new visit format.” No matter the age of the patient, Dr. Lagnese has been amazed at the quality of the interaction between families, patients, caregivers, and hospice nursing staff.

“Our patients are usually meticulous about staying isolated to eliminate risk and the hospice nurse is often their only lifeline to the outside world. They are so appreciative when a nurse or doctor engages with them, even if it's virtually,” Dr. Lagnese said. “I've seen countless patients who I didn't think would be able to interact because of their medical or cognitive state, perk up and smile when we begin the virtual visit — it's very apparent that we can have a meaningful interaction.”

“The ability to interact with patients has dramatically increased our capacity to manage symptoms instantly,” Dr. Miller said. “It has been incredibly helpful for not only patients, but also families and healthcare professionals.”

Investing in Volunteers



Family Hospice volunteers care for patients and their families at a time when they are most vulnerable. Seeing this profound work in action every day requires us to invest in our volunteer team.

Since the work of our volunteers is a direct extension of the functions performed by staff, there is a need for us to ensure we are working well in tandem and providing them with educational opportunities that work toward our common goals of care.

This belief was strongly held by Carol Vockel, who was a volunteer at Family Hospice for more than 30 years. Educating the community and volunteers was at the heart of Carol's mission, and she established a fund serving this purpose in 2015. "She understood that volunteering without

the knowledge provided through specific training was far less effective when helping patients and families," Carol's daughter Peggy, said.

Through the Carol Vockel Fund for Community and Volunteer Education, Family Hospice now has a membership with the Social Work Hospice and Palliative Care Network. Through this membership we can provide our volunteers with online training of best practices. Family Hospice staff also benefits with access to discussion forums, webinars, and networking opportunities.

Throughout 2021, volunteers and staff will view a series of interactive webinars to learn from renowned experts. The sessions will include topics of bereavement, caregiving, communication and will teach methods of assessing situations and needs, identifying behaviors, and utilizing relaxation techniques. Family Hospice bereavement counselors will facilitate a discussion group following the webinars to answer any questions and ensure that everyone understands their role.

"We are eager to use technology to educate our hospice volunteers," Ed Lewis, manager of volunteer

If you are a volunteer and interested in this training, contact Nick Petti at pettin@upmc.edu.

and bereavements departments, said. "Volunteers nurture the organization with their values and endless efforts, and it is our job to invest in them by providing the highest quality training and development we can."

VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT



Not only is Angie Phares an outstanding and generous volunteer for Family Hospice, but she is also a physician assistant, integrative health coach, yoga instructor, and master gardener. She brings a multitude of skills and knowledge that focus on the whole person to her volunteering.

Angie was drawn to hospice by certain instances during her physician's assistant training where she felt patients' end-of-life experiences lacked dignity and comfort. Her initial ventures as a patient volunteer were with individuals who reminded her of her grandmothers. Recalls Angie, "It felt like such reinforcement that this was where I needed to be."

Four years ago, she began volunteering for the Family Hospice Bereavement Department by making supportive bereavement calls to patients' loved ones. She understood how the death of a cherished family member impacted their loved ones and wanted to provide support.

Because of her abilities, she was offered an opportunity to facilitate bereavement support groups. She had facilitated the bereavement group for a year before it was put on hold because of COVID-19. After this change, Angie volunteered to make bereavement calls again. She recently offered to assist bereaved caregivers in learning how to use technology so that they can participate in virtual bereavement support groups.

Angie is always willing to lend a hand, so when the Development Department requested additional support for the annual golf outing, Angie stepped up, donned her cloth mask, and agreed to help.

Nick Petti, Family Hospice volunteer coordinator, said, "We are very lucky to have such a talented and generous person as part of Family Hospice."

How You Can Become a Family Hospice Volunteer

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.

2020 EVENT WRAP-UP

Thank you to all who volunteered and attended events last year. All proceeds support our foundation, which in turn awards a wide array of grants. 2021 grants include:

- Medical treatments such as short-term radiation, blood transfusion, cardiac drips, and oral chemo therapy

- Complementary aromatherapy and music programs

- Resource materials to assist families with difficult conversations

- Grief relief kits

- Hand casting kits to capture the mold of a loved one's hand

The 33rd Annual Golf Outing brought together 80 golfers and raised in excess of \$47,000.

Additionally, the Holiday Dove campaign raised more than \$30,000, offering trees in five locations as well as wall clings and silver ornaments. Also of note, last year's Spring and Lucky Day Raffles brought in more than \$44,000.



Raffle winner Carol Fulton and Christine Jamison, Family Hospice director of development

UPCOMING EVENTS:

Spring Raffle (currently running)

Prizes of \$2,000, \$750, and \$500. Tickets are \$5 each or \$30 for a book of seven. Winner will be drawn May 17, 2021.

Scent of Spring Seed Sale March 1 to April 16

Looking to celebrate Easter and Earth Day? Purchase a collection of four flower seed packs and signs for your special messages for \$13. Packets contain a variety of wildflowers and pollinators.

34th Annual Golf Outing May 17

Enjoy 18 holes of golf, games of skill, awards, raffle baskets, auctions, and more at South Hills Country Club.

\$10,000 Lucky Day Raffle Summer 2021

Grand prize of \$10,000. Second place prize of \$750 in Pennsylvania Lottery scratch-off tickets.

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

Donations of \$500 or more are recognized in print. List reflects donations made in 2020.

ANGEL'S CHOIR \$5,000+

- Anonymous
- Dominion Energy Charitable Foundation
- Friends of Family Hospice
- Diana Harbison
- Sandra Lumish
- T. R. Paul Family Foundation
- The Lembersky Faust Family Fund of the Bank of America Charitable Gift Fund
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DISTINGUISHED DOVES \$1,000-\$4,999

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- Anonymous (4)
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- Ruth G. Foltz
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- Friends of Natalie Mihalek
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- Margaret (Peggy) Harris
- Reneé Holmes

FAMILY FRIENDS \$500-\$999

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- Nancy Chauvet
- D'Alessandro Funeral Home and Crematory LTD
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- Debra Westfall

EVENT SPONSORS

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- UMPC St. Margaret Hospital
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- Redbeard's Bar & Grill
- Snyder of Berlin
- Tito's Vodka

By supporting these campaigns, you are helping to provide enhanced care for many patients and families at a critical time. We hope that we will be a part of your plans in 2021.

Omissions or errors. We are grateful for the ongoing support given by our contributors and make every effort to report giving information accurately. If you discover an error or omission, please accept our sincere apology and contact Christine Jamison, Director of Development, at 412-572-8812 or jamisonc2@upmc.edu.



Family Hospice

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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**.

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FAMILY HOSPICE *34th* ANNUAL CHARITY GOLF OUTING

Get back into the swing of things with 18 holes of golf, chances to win a vehicle lease, cash, and other prizes!

All proceeds benefit services and programs for our patients. The event will follow CDC guidelines ensuring the safety of our guests. For registration, or to inquire about sponsorship opportunities, please contact **whetseld@upmc.edu** or **412-572-8874**.

**MAY 17, 2021
SOUTH HILLS COUNTRY CLUB
PITTSBURGH, PA**

