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Hospice Care Helps Patients and Families Focus on Living

Daughter's Words Give Special Meaning to Significance of VNCH Hospice Care

NOVEMBER 19, 2010 — When you hear the word “hospice,” thoughts immediately focus only on the patient who has reached the end-stage of life, and has chosen to spend that time in his or her own home, surrounded by the people and things that are familiar. But hospice involves both the patient and his/her loved ones, as the words Maureen Spinosa, the daughter of a Visiting Nurse and Community Health Hospice Care patient, will attest. They are especially meaningful this month, since November has been designated as National Hospice/Palliative Care Month.

A Daughter Remembers

Daughter, sister, wife, mother, aunt, gram, goo, friend, all were lost on August 6, 2009.

Pancreatic cancer has no cure, and by the time it was diagnosed, Dr. Francis Nugent at the Lahey Clinic held my mother, Nora Christine Eleanor Crowley Sirois (aka Sis, Bill and Mrs. S), kissed her on the head and told me to take her home. But she was determined to try short-term chemo and radiation to gain even a few weeks. She was very brave, even though she was in extreme pain 24 hours a day. She tried the treatments knowing that there would be no cure. We came home. Visiting Nurse and Community Health's (VNCH) Hospice Care team arrived.

Thanks to VNCH's Hospice Care program, our dear mother didn't spend one night away from her beloved home or family. The brave staff from Hospice Care stepped right in and blended with the seven daughters already on the lines to take care of our mother. Nothing we did was wrong. If it was, we were walked into another room and told or shown how we could better move, lift or care for her. They were accepting of all of our concerns and ready to answer all the questions we fired at them.

There was never a “dumb” question asked, there were never too many people around, and they made sure that we all understood the medications, and how and when to use them. All of the medical supplies and medications were provided with explanations. We were fully informed and equipped to make decisions without fear. VNCH Hospice Care nurses were available within minutes when we needed them.

We were also blessed with a nurse, Annie, from across the street who was here at a moments notice to review information. It also didn't hurt that our niece, Lynn, also a nurse, lived next door. So many people to help lift, move and make sure that Mom was comfortable. We were shown how to give her baths and lifts into the wheelchair so that her grandsons, Toby, Mark, Greg, Keith, or Ryan, whoever was around, were not afraid to move her down the back stairs to enjoy her patio each day.

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Having VNCH's Hospice Care allowed her new friends, Judy next door, Annie across the street, Mary down the street, her lifelong friend, Kitty Cataldo, and all of her children, visits whenever they saw the crowd outside. Her sons-in-law were also available for the lifting, moving and, with Arthur around, to tease her. Two of her sons-in-law, Ken Donnelly and John McCaffery, are firemen and were able to be with her when she passed. Her son in law Ted, and grandson Mark and, friend Peter were there daily to help with errands, again, shown how to lift move and feel comfortable that they were not hurting her.

So many visits, so many friends. Her sister Kay was able to visit each day, feed her, bathe her, and just plain old spend time with her big sister. God bless Aunt Kay. Her brother Jack came after work with milkshakes and to hold her hand and talk about old times. I don't know what we would have done without them. Some of her granddaughters were at work or college, but were able to take shifts around the clock. We did facials, manicures (thanks Amanda), pedicures, hair curling, crazy hats, and dance nights.

It would have been impossible to believe that all seven daughters could be back under one roof for that period of time and allowed to give back to their mother the love, care, kindness and attention she showed each one of us. Poor Dad (Robert Sirois) felt left out. All he asked for was time to sit, hold her hand and have some quiet time without all the girls "gabbing". All of us got what we wanted.

When mom left us, her VNCH Hospice Care nurse, Louise Ward, was here. We had time to be alone with our mother, to hold her one more time to say what we needed to say. Had she been in a hospital, none of this could have happened, there would be bells, people coming and going taking, vitals at all times, limits on visitors, and we would not have been the caretakers. I'm sure that some will need a hospital setting, but for us VNCH's Hospice Care enabled us to share the last days of our mother's life during a beautiful summer, resting on her own patio, surrounded by family and friends. From the bottom of our hearts, we will forever be grateful that Visiting Nurse and Community Health's Hospice Care team was available to us.

With gratitude, the Robert Sirois Family (daughters Maureen Spinosa, Judy Donnelly Susan Dekant, Nancy McCaffery, Kathy Sirois, Bonnie Sirois-Ardizzoni, Noreen Savage-Sirois, Aunt Kay and Uncle Jack

National Hospice/Palliative Care Month

Hospice care helps patients and families focus on living. This is the message that Visiting Nurse and Community Health's (VNCH) Hospice Care program wants to share with the community, especially during November, which is National Hospice/Palliative Care Month. However, this important message is important all year round.

"November is a valuable time to raise awareness throughout our community about care at the end of life," said VNCH's Chief Executive Officer, Christine Dixon. "But the time a family might need us doesn't follow a calendar or occur only during this season, so our message must make an impression that stays with people all year long."

Every November, hospices across the country reach out to raise awareness of the compassionate care that hospice and palliative care provide patients and families coping with serious and life-limiting illness. The *Seasons of Caring* theme reminds people that life's final seasons can be some of the most fulfilling, especially when patients and families look to program's like VNCH's Hospice Care for help.

VNCH's Hospice Care team provides expert medical care to keep patients comfortable and able to enjoy time with loved ones. The hospice team answers questions, offers advice on what to expect, and helps families with the duties of being a caregiver. The team also provides emotional and spiritual support for the entire family.

“With the help of hospice, patients and families alike can focus on what’s most important – enjoying life together and living the final seasons to their fullest,” said VNCH’s Hospice Care manager, Lauren Shaughnessy. “It’s about the quality of life.”

About VNCH Hospice Care

Visiting Nurse and Community Health, a 501(c)(3) non-profit agency, has extended its long-standing reputation for treating its patients with the highest quality home health care, to include Hospice Care. VNCH Hospice Care opened in 2009 and delivers compassionate, comprehensive services to patients with advanced and often life-threatening illnesses, and their families. VNCH Hospice Care’s team of dedicated nurses, doctors, social workers, inter-faith chaplains, volunteers, therapists, and home health aides all work together to help patients suffering from advanced illness to maintain their dignity while receiving care that promotes comfort and support.

VNCH Hospice Care serves the following communities: Arlington, Bedford, Belmont, Billerica, Burlington, Cambridge, Carlisle, Concord, Everett, Lexington, Lincoln, Malden, Medford, Melrose, Somerville, Stoneham, Wakefield, Waltham, Watertown, Wilmington, Winchester, and Woburn.

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