

DAIZI SCHIANO

Helping patients and families say goodbye

BY WENDY GUILD SWEARINGEN

Daizi Schiano, age thirty, has been a hospice nurse for seven years at Schoellkopf Center hospice wing, David's Path, at Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center. During that time, she has helped countless humans through their final transitions. She chose this path, as many do, because of personal experience with hospice. "When I was twenty years old, my stepfather, who really helped raise me, was diagnosed with prostate cancer," Schiano shares. "Unfortunately, he passed under hospice. And I saw how much comfort they brought to my mom and my family. I just knew it was something I wanted to do for others."

Her job requires head-to-toe assessments of patients every day, making sure that all their symptoms are managed, including pain, anxiety, and breathing. "I'm here to handle all the end-of-life matters and make sure the family understands what's going on and to make sure they're comfortable with the process," Schiano says.

Even in the best of times, great empathy and strength are required to perform hospice work. The pandemic brought new challenges and creativity to Schiano's care. Families were desperate to see loved ones in nursing homes and hospice centers, but, at the peak of the pandemic, families weren't allowed in, regardless if there was COVID in the building or not.

To solve the problem, Schiano used her personal phone to connect families via FaceTime. "I put it in a little Ziploc bag, so it's all sealed and away from everything. And cleaned it the way you'd clean your face shield," she says. "We did a lot of FaceTime visits with families or even just talked on the phone." She was happy to make these connections, especially with the COVID patients. "Being able to say their goodbyes or talk to them on the phone one last time, it's not the ideal closure," Schiano admits, "but at least it's a little something that we could offer them."

Schiano recalls the first COVID-positive patient she cared for. "It really got to me, because it was my first experience, my first time being in head-to-toe protective equipment and face shield and having to FaceTime a family member who I'd never met. The person on the other end of the phone is me, and you can't really see my face, and you can't see my expressions. Having to have them say goodbye was difficult."

For families with loved ones in hospice, Schiano recommends reaching out to the hospice team. "We are more than willing to go above and beyond and FaceTime if we need to or call when we're there," says Schiano, who notes there's no word yet on when visitation regulations will change. "But, ask us, 'Is there any way I can see Mom today on FaceTime? Or can I call you on the phone when you go see her?' It's so difficult; we understand the other side of things. We want to help our families as much as possible. Just reach out. Anything that we can do, we will."