

Timelier Hospice Care Benefits Patients, Caregivers, Families

As a Niagara Hospice volunteer I have had the opportunity and privilege to visit more than 2,000 patients and family members over the last seven and a half years.

During many of those occasions, they were lavish in their praise about the quality of care provided by the Niagara Hospice team of physicians, nurses, aides, social workers, spiritual care counselors and others.

“I don’t know what we would have done without Niagara Hospice these last seven months,” remarked one woman as she sat next to her husband’s bed at Niagara Hospice House in Lockport one day not long ago. “Not only have they taken wonderful care of him, the support they’ve given our family is amazing. We could not be more grateful.”

While that family has received the full benefit of Niagara Hospice services, studies show that unfortunately many patients and families wait far too long before seeking hospice care. Niagara Hospice officials say that many patients are coming to them with only weeks or days to live. That was very apparent while visiting patients this past month. In three cases family members told me their loved ones had been under hospice care only a few days. All of the patients were deceased in less than a week.

“These situations are heartbreaking because we could have done so much more for them and their families if the hospice conversation had occurred sooner,” lamented a Niagara Hospice nurse.

Candidates for hospice care are people with a terminal illness whose life expectancy is six months or less if the disease were to run its normal course. In some cases, patients live well beyond six months. Studies, including one by the New England Journal of Medicine, show that patients with a terminal disease who receive hospice care earlier in their illness often live longer and enjoy a better quality of life than those who do not experience the benefit of hospice services.

Several years ago when my late mother-in-law was diagnosed with a serious illness, my wife and I contacted Niagara Hospice when it became apparent she was declining significantly. The hospice care she received initially in our home and later at Niagara Hospice House was extraordinary. Her condition actually improved for several months, and convinced us we made the right decision. Her quality of life was better, the hospice team managed her pain more effectively, and she lived long beyond our expectations.

As someone, who for many years has witnessed firsthand the benefits of Niagara Hospice services, I urge you not to be the patient or family member who says, “I wish I had called Niagara Hospice sooner.” And, if you know any neighbors, friends or relatives who are caring for someone with a serious or terminal illness, encourage them to call Niagara Hospice sooner rather than later because the hospice team’s compassionate and comforting care WILL make a difference in their lives and the life of their loved one.

Niagara Hospice is the only hospice provider in Niagara County. Hospice services are covered fully under Medicare, and most other insurers also cover hospice care.

Information about Niagara Hospice services is available at www.niagarahospice.org or by calling (716) 439-4417.

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