

South Florida Hospital NewsTM

THE REGION'S MONTHLY HEALTHCARE NEWSPAPER

Hospice of Palm Beach County Volunteers: Different Roles, One Common Goal

The sounds of music lilt through the halls of the inpatient unit at the C. W. Gerstenberg Hospice Center in West Palm Beach. "Oh what a beautiful morning," sings a trio of volunteers to a patient as her family looks on. Inside the kitchen, Dorothea Stein—also a volunteer—hurriedly grills chicken as part of her daily lunch preparation for hundreds of patients, staff, and volunteers. Upstairs, stacks of medical records are being processed by Jacky Cummings and Chick Wachtel, also volunteers. "We feel like we're giving back. It makes a tremendous difference for patients and families," Wachtel said. Meantime, volunteers are visiting patients and helping families throughout Palm Beach County.

The singers plus Dorothea, Jacky and Chick are a few of the more than 650 volunteers who provide support to Hospice of Palm Beach County programs at the organization's six inpatient units, the John J. Brogan Horizons Bereavement Center or wherever patients reside. Volunteers often work one-on-one to provide comfort and companionship to patients in their home, skilled nursing or assisted living facility. Others provide respite care to allow a patient's caregiver time outside the home. Volunteers do clerical or administrative work. Others work in the kitchen, the Resale Shops, or medical records, accounting or community development depart-



Photo credit: Walt Stearns

Brian and Paula Gould are pictured with their volunteer canine, Dusty. The Great Dane is certified in Pet Therapy.

ments. Interfacing with staff or working closely with patients, they gave more than 55,000 hours last fiscal year. To say their role at Hospice of Palm Beach County is crucial is an understatement.

What is it that makes so many give of themselves to Hospice and why? For many, volunteering is a way to say "thank you" for the care Hospice of Palm Beach County provided to a loved one. One volunteer shared, "There is no better way for me to show my appreciation and repay Hospice for its care, concern and compassion. We're a very special support group," he said. Volunteer Ruth Goldstein's brother-in-law, friend, and husband were all Hospice of Palm Beach County patients. "I figure if I can help people in any way, I want to do that," she said. For others, volunteering gives them a sense of satisfaction. Volunteer John Gash sings to patients twice a week. "What do we get out of it?" he asked. Patient happiness and joy," he said. Another volunteer expressed a sen-

timent felt by so many. "I've done many things in my life, but this is the best. This is the top. I love it. I love what I do. I've heard people say it comes back tenfold. It does. It really does," she said.

The volunteers are led by Dee Johnson, Manager of Volunteer Services. "They're a valued part of our team," Johnson said. "They play a critical role in us reaching our mission. We couldn't possibly operate a program caring for more than 1,050 patients a day without volunteers providing an extra hand," she said. Despite the high number of volunteers, Johnson says there is still a need for more. "We could always use more help and more volunteers with expertise in various specialties—including but not limited to computer graphics, medical records, scanning, and more."

To learn more about volunteering with Hospice of Palm Beach County, call (561) 273-2204.

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