

ABOUT HOSPICE VOLUNTEERS

(For Medicare/Medicaid certified programs)

The role of hospice volunteers ____

The Hospice tradition has always included volunteers. Hospice of Northwest Michigan started providing its volunteer services in November of 1983. Over the years the program and its volunteers have earned a reputation for quality, compassion, caring and competence.

The trained hospice volunteer is part of the patient's Hospice Care Team and Hospice Care Plan. As a team member, if the volunteer observes something that he/she thinks the team should know about, such as something he/she knows is a complication, or is contrary to the Care Plan, or which might be a safety hazard the volunteer communicates that concern to another team member such as the Volunteer Coordinator or the Team Leader. For immediate or emergency events, the volunteer always has telephone access to hospice medical team members at all times. A volunteer's observations can provide critically important information to the Hospice Care Team. For example, a volunteer might be the first to notice that the principal caregiver's performance is rapidly declining, a change in patient behavior has occurred or even that a patient or family member is beginning to think of suicide.

Bereavement services and assisting patient and family members to cope with loss is a constant theme in hospice volunteer work. A terminal diagnosis, however many weeks, months or years a patient may live, is itself a loss for the patient and family accompanied by grief. The diminished capacity of the patient and related changes in daily life are also losses for the patient and family. How individuals respond to loss is highly variable but the presence of a trained, caring volunteer can be immensely helpful. A hospice volunteer may provide bereavement support to the patient or family members while contributing to the work of the hospice care team.

After the death of a patient hospice programs offer family members 13 months of supportive bereavement services. Hospice of Northwest Michigan also provides bereavement services and grief support groups for non-hospice individuals. A hospice volunteer may play a variety of roles supporting these services.

Types of Volunteer Work ____

A hospice volunteer may be asked to do a variety of things to assist a hospice patient or family as well as the community, such as:

- Errands for a hospice household such as grocery shopping
- Spending time with the hospice patient for the patient's enjoyment and stimulation and/or to provide a break for the caregiver(s) so that they can relax, run errands, keep appointments while confident their loved one is not alone and unattended
- Helping a hospice patient to write letters, use a computer, or engage in hobbies and tasks
- Assisting residents to plan in advance for their medical care choices
- Providing bereavement support services
- Many other possibilities including education and outreach to inform the public about hospice services, administrative support and fundraising work in support of the program

Depending upon their capacities and comfort level, volunteers may set the pattern of doing all things or only some things that may be needed. In some cases volunteer involvement with a hospice patient is occasional and minimal and in others it is substantial. Even in "minimal" involvement cases, the timing of the assistance may be profoundly important to caregiver, patient or family.

The items listed above may seem mundane or downright boring but not so when the volunteer's involvement is more than minimal. What's really important is the volunteer presence, companionship, moral support, and relationship with patient and caregiver. A hospice volunteer's presence, capacity to listen and companionship can be a remarkable support to patients and families, and be a source of important information for the hospice care team. A volunteer is engaged with a patient and family undergoing a unique transition and provides a valuable and rewarding service by being present, by listening and by understanding. Being there and listening constitute caring, and a caring presence is a large part of comfort for patient and caregiver. Volunteers report they often find their extraordinary experiences to be enriching and rewarding.

A hospice volunteer **does not** engage in:

- Patient transportation
- Personal Care such as bathing
- Preparing Meals other than Light Cooking
- Patient feeding
- Preparing medications
- Being judgmental, especially about moral, personal, political or religious subjects
- Any activity considered to be unsafe

The Application and Training process ____

Prospective volunteers* apply for a volunteer position. The process is very similar to applying for a job. Indeed, being a Hospice Volunteer is also very similar to having a job. The hospice volunteer is trained, the work is supervised and volunteer is evaluated at least annually.

Volunteer training includes initial training of 14 hours plus occasional in-service training. Volunteer training addresses the following topics:

- I. Orientation
- II. Admission Process and Diseases/Death and Dying
- III. Communication Skills, understanding the Family/Ethical Issues
- IV. Nutrition/Care and Comfort Measures
- V. Funeral Home Tour / Medical Care Planning (5 Wishes)
- VI. TB Testing, OSHA, In-service Training
- VII. Spiritual Care of the Family

Besides the volunteer's application being accepted and the training successfully completed, a Hospice Volunteer must:

- Agree to a written Personnel Agreement
- Agree to a written Volunteer Confidentiality Agreement
- Agree to a written Confidentiality Policy
- Agree not to accept gifts or gratuities
- Complete a criminal background check
- Complete annual Tuberculosis tests
- Agree to a written Physical/Sexual Abuse Policy
- Maintain service logs and records
- Accept/Decline Hepatitis B Vaccination

*Hospice of Northwest Michigan welcomes friends and family members of previous hospice patients to join our hospice volunteer staff after a 12-month bereavement period.

Commitment to Quality ____

The Hospice Program offered jointly by the Hospice of Northwest Michigan and the Health Department of Northwest Michigan is certified by the US Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services and Accredited by the Community Health Accreditation Program. We enjoy productive, supportive relationships with public, private and non-profit health care providers and organizations including other hospice organizations. Over time the program has developed an excellent volunteer training program that has been utilized by other area hospice programs. Through cooperative agreements, volunteers of Hospice of Northwest Michigan and Hospice of Little Traverse Bay can be transferred between programs when needed.